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Leadership In Collaborations: School District Governance In The Context of Leading Non-System Actors

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**Leadership In Collaborations:
School District Governance In The Context of Leading Non-System Actors**

Glenn Allan Brand

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Education

University of Bath

Department of Education

April 2015

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For Laura, Carly & Dylan

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DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY FOR DOCTORAL THESIS

I hereby declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, contains no material previously published or written in any medium by another person, except where appropriate reference or citation has been made.

“One function – everyday competence in running schools – is often dismissed as “mere management” (rather than leadership). Yet ask teachers and parents whether these matters are important: bus schedules that deliver children safely and efficiently, plumbing that works, adequate photocopy machines, roofs that don’t leak, modern playing fields that are level and mowed, and opportunities for teachers to reconsider what and how they teach. If classroom instruction is to proceed smoothly, someone has to see to such matters, and this is an important part of the business of school districts.....and their administrators.”

(Tyack, 2002, pg. 22.)

ABSTRACT

Throughout the United States school districts are increasingly entering collaborative arrangements with outside providers to assist in the provision of products and services to meet the needs of the system. This approach mirrors those underway in other local public and private sectors of society that are pursuing collaborative arrangements as a means to supplement their work and aid in meeting their organizational needs. However, these structural arrangements lead to an alteration of the traditional hierarchical model of organizational management which typifies the ‘template’ within which these organizations have been structured. The entry of a provider from outside of the school system (referred to as a *non-system actor* within the present study) necessitates that leaders of these organizations not only lead the agency, staff and programs that they are directly responsible for but also these wider collaborative arrangements and the *actors* therein. Reference within the public administration literature to the leadership found in these organizational arrangements is frequently referred to as *collaborative* or *network* leadership.

This thesis develops a set of findings using qualitative data gathered through individual semi-structured interviews with school district leaders in two U.S. public school districts. The primary aim of this enquiry was to investigate the nature of appropriate leadership and management practices as conceptualized by school district leaders operating within collaborative arrangements that engage non-system actors in the work of the district.

The findings are structured into three main themes. The first theme addresses the rationale behind why district leaders decided to pursue collaborative arrangements. The study found that school district leaders pursue arrangements with non-system actors based upon the perception that the organization often needs to compensate for limitations of funding, personnel and expertise.

The second theme provides an understanding of how these organizational arrangements may impact the work of the district leader. The findings establish insight into the fact that

these forms of collaborative arrangements hold the potential to adversely impact district activity and the role that the district leader plays including contending with issues of control and accountability as well as the integration of the non-system actor into the organization.

The third theme addresses how district leaders conceptualize the necessary and appropriate leadership and management practices in overseeing collaborative arrangements that include non-system actors. There were three broader sub-themes identified. First, preparation for entering an arrangement with a non-system actor included the need to establish legitimacy with existing staff, a clear and coherent rationale for the collaborative arrangement itself as well as the need to thoughtfully broker relationships between system and non-system actors. Second, leaders identified the need to establish the context of the organization as part of the arrangement which included articulating organizational values, goals and expectations including the clarification of routines and practices. The third and final sub-theme that emerged centered around the oversight of non-system actor activity which included developing systems of accountability, assessing and reviewing the goals for the arrangement and planning for sustainability.

A secondary aim of the study was to analyze how relevant leadership theories and/or models can inform an understanding of the practices of leading and managing within collaborative organizational arrangements situated within public education. The literature review briefly explored elements of leadership models or theories which included *Inter-Agency Collaborations across Organizational Boundaries*, *Public Network Management* theory and *Collaborative Leadership*. Based upon the data collected through these case studies, the conceptualization of leading and managing non-system actors at the school district level shares a strong alignment with the elements, themes and aspects associated with these relevant leadership theories advanced in the public administration literature. The findings herein suggest that there is a “through-line” within these practices that relates to the dominant needs of the organization centering around not so much the physical management of the arrangement but rather the leadership of the people including

both *system* and *non-system* actors. Consequently, it was found that the application of these relevant theories can serve as viable frameworks in order to further analyze the activity associated with these forms of leadership.

The thesis contributes to the field of leadership within public sector settings including public education. Educational researches interested in examining school and district leadership can use the results of this study, along with leadership models and frameworks found in the public administration field, to further explore leading and managing non-system actors engaged in formal collaborations within both the public sector but more particularly within school districts.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Systems of public education throughout the United States (U.S.) have been traditionally organized around a structural configuration that is conceptualized as the *school district*. These organizational configurations vary in terms of geographical size, the number of schools under their authority and total student enrollment. What tends to be consistent within these structures include hallmarks associated with local decision making, control and funding with oversight carried out through local governance as a means to deliver instructional programs (Meyer, Scott & Strang, 1987; Davies & Hentschke, 2002). In addition, the supervision and oversight of service delivery within this “template” has typically included the positioning of professionals in senior level leadership positions who are charged with the responsibility of governing these hierarchical systems.

Within the context of the U.S. localized school district model, senior leaders include those employed at the district level who are collectively responsible for managing, administering and leading an array of schools and programs throughout the district. As the growing challenges associated with the current era of systemic instructional reform in public education extend throughout most industrialized countries, those in executive or senior leadership roles have been forced to adopt strategies that aim to enhance capacity, productivity and efficiency in an effort to help realize educational and instructional reform (Coburn, Bae & Turner, 2008; Burch, 2006; 2009). The intensification of the work related to these reforms, which carries with it a relentless emphasis on student achievement, compliance with standards and a quest for continuous performance improvement, has increasingly led system leaders to pursue strategies that include collaborative arrangements with individuals, firms or agencies as a means to aid in the delivery of teaching and the facilitation of learning throughout the district (Tyack, 2002; Honig, 2009).

Increasingly, formalized *collaborative* arrangements that include interplay between state and non-state actors serve as means to meet contemporary governance challenges

(Sullivan, Williams & Jeffares, 2012). Bryson, Crosby and Middleton-Stone (2006) suggest that central to these re-structuring efforts is the real sense that public sectors can no longer rely upon their own internal capacity to deliver necessary services and have suggested that these types of cross-sector collaborations are “...*assumed to be both necessary and desirable as a strategy for addressing many of society’s most difficult public challenges.*” (Bryson et al, 2006; pg. 44). Echoing similar sentiments, Arganoff and McGuire (2001) argue that such alterations are associated with the pace and quality of ‘social change’ and Kooiman (2003) identifies these reformations as those which reflect a change in government roles from direct provision to partnering and contracting. The structural reconfigurations implemented to enable collaboration within public education mirror those within the broader field of the public service sector where organizations are increasingly undergoing transformations that alter the traditional manner in which they are organized and conduct and carry out their business.

1.1 Background to the Problem

The notion of collaborative arrangements has increasingly been used to describe those settings within organizations where there are multiple actors from both inside and outside of the agency or firm that are engaged in a joint or combined effort to carry out the necessary work and meet the organization’s needs. Throughout the literature, this concept has become increasingly associated with a variety of alternative terms including *multi-actor settings*, *inter-organizational relations*, *partnerships* and *networks* (Silva & McGuire, 2010). Yet, despite the fact that such arrangements are increasingly considered commonplace in contemporary society, empirical understanding regarding the impact that such activity has *within* the organization, including in and around the domain of *leading and managing* within these contexts, is scarce and relatively unaddressed (Kelman, Hong & Turbitt, 2011). Where scholarly enquiry has unfolded, much of the discourse has been situated at the institutional and organizational level with comparatively little attention paid to what the role of individuals involved in the management of these arrangements actually need or require to be successful (Williams, 2002). Theoretically, Silva and McGuire (2010) argue that leadership in multi-actor, collaborative settings has been

discussed in the literature through aspects of public policy, management, leadership and governance however empirical data on the subject is limited (Sullivan, Williams & Jeffares, 2011). Thus, while governments (or public providers) are increasingly sharing their ‘space’ with other actors in their efforts to address and provide for the needs facing these sectors within society, new modes of governance are required in response to the increasing need of navigating what it means to manage and lead *of* public organizations to what it means to provide leadership *across* organizations and organizational boundaries (Kooiman, 2003; Morse, 2008).

In extending this line of enquiry to the field of governing within public education, efforts aimed at understanding the role and work of the district leader within education are vital given the important role that central office leadership plays in guiding the work of the district and the school houses contained under its control. Elmore (1993) has previously identified school districts as agents of instructional change with district leadership interconnected with the study of educational reform. Fullan (2005) contends that the district leader’s position in the work of education, carried out within the walls of the district, is fundamental where these system leaders shoulder the responsibility of exercising leadership that ensures student achievement will meet increasing state and national standards.

Contracting for services with outside providers (or non-system actors) has been associated with public education for some time (DiMartino, 2014). However, while the tendency has been for both schools and school districts to purchase non-instructional services such as those related to transportation, food and custodial work, recent trends have seen districts increase their engagement with providers who also offer instructional related services. In turn, these transformations, which are undergirded by the belief that public-private partnerships might be more effective, efficient and innovative than the public bureaucracies they are replacing (Chubb & Moe, 1990; DiMartino, 2014) are leading to a reconceptualization of how educational services are delivered (DiMartino, 2014). Consequently, as public school districts in the U.S. increasingly pursue collaborative arrangements with organizations, individuals, and agencies situated outside

the boundaries of the system, there is a growing need to better understand the implications regarding the operation and function of the district office and its leaders as it relates to guiding and overseeing the complex work of the district (Honig, 2009; Coburn, Bae & Turner, 2008, Marsh, 2002). Similar to the call to better understand the implications for governance within the increasingly diverse, dynamic and rapidly changing social environments within which public sectors operate, developing a deeper insight into understanding leading and managing within these contexts of public education is both timely and necessary (Kooiman, 2003).

The primary purpose of this enquiry is to better understand the nature of appropriate leadership and management practices as conceptualized by school district leaders operating within collaborative organizational arrangements. As it is increasingly being recognized, effectiveness and success within these arrangements is inherently tied to the individual actors in the process and the people responsible for overseeing these inter-organizational ventures (Williams, 2002). Consequently, it seems fitting to begin to develop insight into the perceptions of those key individuals operating at the district level regarding this work and the implications that these collaborative arrangements have on their work of leadership which steps outside the bounds of the traditional hierarchical structure that has been so ingrained in public education.

A secondary purpose of this research enquiry is situated within the broader context of public administration scholarship and the efforts underway that are beginning to focus on leading and managing within public sectors. This research enquiry also aims to analyze how relevant leadership theories and/or models can inform an understanding of the practices of leading and managing at the senior or executive level of district leadership within collaborative organizational arrangements situated within public education. In so doing, the study also seeks to heed the call grounded in public administration theory that calls for the establishment a more theoretically informed framework to better understand leadership and management within these settings while applying it to the context of leadership at the school district level. It is anticipated that if the relevant theories and models found within the public administration literature connected to leading and

managing within these contexts can be applied to school district leaders, then this holds promise for further scholarly activity that will benefit those seeking to understand success in an environment that is increasing with such activity.

1.2 Rationale for the Enquiry

There are two factors that help serve as a rationale for the present study. First, there is the underlying premise that effective district-level leadership will continue to be necessary in advancing school and district-wide improvement. Second, arrangements that engage actors from outside of the public education space are likely to expand and become more commonplace across the landscape. Consequently, additional inquiry that seeks to try and better understand what district leaders perceive as appropriate leadership and management practices within these collaborative settings is both timely and necessary. As Kelman et al (2011) suggest, there are few topics in contemporary public management where interest is high but an empirical understanding low as that of cross-boundary or integrative collaborative management settings.

From a scholarly perspective, these developments are of interest for a number of reasons and serve as a rationale for this inquiry. First, it cannot be overstated that these forms of organizational activity within the U.S. public education system are on the rise with estimates that schools and local school districts spent over 4.8 billion dollars on products and services from private entities in 2008, up from 2.5 billion in 2000 (Burch, 2009). Thus, arrangements that rely upon the flow of outside service arrangements that include non-system actors coming into the district are not only considerable, but are also expanding. However, widespread efforts to conceptualize educational privatization have tended to focus on the economic or technical aspects of the arrangements and, in so doing, have often underemphasized or negated the social and political impact on the organization including that of leadership (Scott & DiMartino, 2009). Burch (2006; 2009) has argued that this activity, and these forms of collaborations, affect school governance by transferring increased decision-making authority to external authorities outside of the school system over what traditionally have been district functions (Burch, 2006; 2009). It

would seem that there is a direct need to understand the experiences of leaders operating within this new expanded space and within the confines of these arrangements.

Second, this line of inquiry as established in the present study attempts to respond to the call to support a broader sense and conceptualization of leadership within the educational setting that effectively mirrors those in other sectors. Borrowing the conceptual framework from the literature within the public sector, there has been increasingly calls for a clearer and deeper understanding of that which constitutes effective leadership within the context of collaborative governance, or, the leadership skills necessary to support collaborations between organizations (i.e. see Morse, 2008). This area of focus runs throughout the public administration literature and represents a paradigm shift situated within the context of public administration as well as within the context of a larger global trend (Friedman, 2005; Morse, 2008). Contemporary views of leadership, within the public sector and the field, have revolved around leading the organization and the people within it, or that of *intra-organizational* leadership (Van Wart, 2005). As collaborations between organizations expand, and arrangements with actors outside of the system emerge, it is increasingly important that there is a clearer focus on operational effectiveness within the context of *inter-organizational* leadership (Morse, 2008). This study also seeks to contribute to a larger need within the educational leadership field advanced by Honig (2009) who argues that what is needed is a:

“...growing line of research that challenges scholars of educational leadership to expand the traditional scope of our own field from examining mainly school-level leadership to truly focusing in educational leadership – the pursuit of improvement from a variety of organizational and institutional positions both inside and outside formal school systems (Honig, 2009; pg. 412.).

Third, this line of research aligns with the needs within the area of public administration literature. Specifically, while empirical insight is expanding, there is little known research on the role of effective leadership practices of non-system actors within the public education setting. What is needed is a deeper understanding of the experiences of leaders who have operated within these arrangements. While this study does not claim to be

exhaustive in its ability to establish consistent conclusions, its significance does establish insight into the broad area of enquiry while identifying possibilities for future research.

Finally, my interest in this particular topic emerges through my role in educational administration. As a school district administrator, I recognize that these arrangements are likely to only expand as the challenges facing public education mount alongside a continual strain with financial resources. In turn, seeking a deeper understanding regarding the nature of appropriate leadership and management practices, as conceptualized by school district leaders with experience operating within such environments, seems reasonably advanced through two pathways: i) gathering insight from those in the role as to what they perceive to be appropriate, necessary and important in leading and managing within these forms of organizational arrangements and; ii) developing a theoretical means through which to further analyze and examine leading and managing within these contexts to help guide further scholarly inquiry.

1.3 Organization of the Study

The present study is organized around six chapters that follow this introductory chapter. The second chapter of this research enquiry includes an overview and analysis of the literature related to the topic of the enquiry. Specifically, this literature review will broadly focus on public sector administration as well as school districts and school leadership. The third chapter will provide details about the methodology used, including the research questions, to probe the experiences of school district leaders in order to help conceptualize the nature of appropriate leadership and management practices within collaborative arrangements. The fourth chapter presents the findings from the data collected and presents the views of the actors in the two school districts regarding their experiences of leading and managing within these collaborative arrangements. The fifth chapter includes a discussion regarding the findings of the study followed by the sixth chapter which serves as conclusion to the study.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

Throughout both public and private sectors, the modern era of organizational reform has included the increase of collaborative arrangements which have been utilized as a strategic means to fulfill required demands and bring improvements to scale. On multiple levels, these arrangements have implications for the wider organizational players or actors as it relates to those serving in leadership positions. However, despite the growing awareness of these emerging trends, the research remains thin in examining these organizational changes.

The broader field of public education has not been immune to the transformations associated with collaborative organizational arrangements as individual schools, as well as school districts, are increasingly pursuing collaborative agreements as a way to leverage improvements in service delivery. As Coburn, Bae and Turner (2008) have noted:

“Now more than ever before, school districts are attempting ambitious reform initiatives intended to improve instruction in schools throughout the district. As school districts move toward systemic approaches to instructional reform – as they attempt to foster instructional improvement at scale – they are increasingly reaching out to a range of external service providers to support them in this ambitious task.”
(Coburn, Bae & Turner, 2008; pg. 365)

This chapter attempts to ‘weave’ together aspects of the literature situated within the two broad fields of public administration theory and school district leadership and reform in an effort to establish a context for the present study. The chapter is organized into two general sections that collectively serve as the review of the literature for this study. The first section of the chapter focuses on the public administration literature and examines public sector transformations, leadership within the public sector and leadership and management within collaborations. It concludes with a brief discussion of some of the theoretical foundations associated with collaborative governance structures. The second section of the chapter focuses on the broad themes associated with public education and

examines the context of the U.S. school district and their role in educational reform, the changing template of the school district and the role of school district leaders. Also included is a section that provides a brief examination of collaborations and leadership within the context of the school district. The third section of the chapter establishes an argument for seeking out district leader perceptions regarding the effective competencies of collaborative leadership and the final section briefly outlines the implications for research.

2.1 Public Administration and Public Sector Leadership

While the present study will center around issues related to school district leadership within a context that includes collaborations between school districts and non-system actors, it seems both worthy and necessary to establish a base to this enquiry as situated within the public administration scholarship. Throughout the section that follows I examine public sector transformations within the literature. I will then explore aspects of leadership within the research surrounding the public domain followed by a brief review of the literature surrounding leadership and management within collaborative arrangements. I conclude the section by considering some of the theoretical foundations that can be associated with collaborative governance structures.

2.1.1 Public Sector Organizational Transformations

Throughout the last four decades, in many industrialized countries, services within the public sector have been engaged in an evolution which has included rapid rates of change in response to the societal shifts associated with globalization and the explosion of technological advancements. Alongside the introduction of market-based socioeconomic systems these transformations have begun to penetrate all sectors throughout society causing a re-orientation of the fundamental foundation of organizational forms (Schneider, 2002). The degree to which these transformations have taken root throughout this postmodern era has been extensive, resulting in a re-imaging of the organizational

“template” for many sectors within society, including those delivering public services (Brown & Potoski, 2005).

On a theoretical level, Burch (2009; 2006) has argued these transformations in the structure of these ‘organizational forms’ represents a broader ideological shift in theories connected to the economic and political regulation that tends to govern society. For example, anchored within the public administration field, the application of terms such as *neoliberalism*, *New Public Management* or *New Public Service* has been employed in an attempt to capture the transformations that are underway (Morse, 2008). In looking specifically at organizational frameworks, Williams (2002) has advanced a conceptual framework that encompasses both the modern and postmodern forms of organizations as a means to serve as a backdrop to such enquiry. In the “classical” or modern form of organizational theory, Williams (2002) suggests that organizations tend to be characterized by such things as linear thinking, functionalism and task differentiation (Williams, 2002). Within these bounds, organizations tend to be orientated around bureaucracy, hierarchy and mechanistic structures that are wrapped tightly within an intra-organizational design. In contrast, postmodern organizations, or those are associated with “New Public Management” trends (Burch, 2006) tend to be structured around wider systems that are inter-organizational and include structural elements that rely upon *collaborations*, *partnerships* and *networks*.

Cucchiara et al (2011), Bartlett et al (2002) and Whitty and Power (2000) have applied the inter-organizational framework to this model of public sector service provision as a means to describe the reformation of practices in terms of how the ‘work’ of the organization is carried out and by whom. These changes have independently led to a transformation in organizational design and internal practices as a result of such things as contingent or contract workers, strategic alliances, outsourcing, networks, partnerships, collaborations and heterarchies to aid in the delivery of goods and services and through which the demands associated with public service are met (Brown & Potoski, 2005; Farrell & Morris, 2003; O’Reilly & Reed, 2011; Schneider, 2002; Morse & Buss, 2007).

Williams (2002) provides an overview of the frameworks associated with the modern and post-modern form of organizations and attempts to distinguish dominant aspects related to their organizational forms as represented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Modern and Post Modern Forms of Organizations

	Modern	Postmodern
Domain	Intra-organizational	Inter-organizational
Metaphor	Mechanistic	Systems
Form of government	Administration	Governance
Form of organization	Bureaucratic	Networking/collaboration/partnerships
Conceptualization	Differentiation/tasks & functions	Negotiation and consensus
Decision-making framework	Hierarchy and rules	Relational
Competency	Skills-based professional	Experimentation/innovation/ reflection
Solutions	Optimal	

Source: Williams (2002)

Formalized collaborations or arrangements with non-system actors outside of the agency adopt a number of pathways that alter or transform the way in which ‘business’ unfolds within the organization (Williams, 2002). Increasingly, Williams (2002) contends that the pathways associated with how business becomes transformed within the public sector under such a re-orientation include:

- Transferring public service functions to the private sector completely.
- Selling entire services to the private sector (i.e. utility companies).
- Allowing a private firm or company to provide or offer a service that remains paid for (of funded) through the taxation process (i.e. charter schools).
- Freeing up arrangements to allow private sector firms to enter into the ‘space’ where welfare is provided alongside public provision.

The manifestation of these changes has resulted in what Millard and Provan (2003) have described as ‘networked government’ which increasingly has led to a devolution of responsibility for governmental programs. In addition, there are various other transformations associated with these pathways that include decentralization and outsourcing within public services. It is as a result of and through these changes that issues of *governance*, *responsibility*, *leadership* and *management* emerge as areas of focus which warrant additional enquiry. In general, leadership is difficult and challenging work, irrespective of an agency’s size, their service or the sector that an organization is

situated within. But, within this post-modernized world that has seen the boundaries of organizations, authority and areas of responsibility blurred, leadership has surely become more difficult and the range of skills for leaders intensified (Van Wart, 2003).

It is precisely in response to the changes associated with the post-modern organizational environment in which consideration of the traits or characteristics associated with the post-modern form of organizational design and characteristics associated with the structure emerge as relevant. As a result of this evolution the role of the administrator and leader takes on a renewed focus within these organizations. Specifically, there emerges a need to understand what is both *necessary* and *appropriate* to effectively lead and manage within these new structural designs as organizational templates and how the business of *leading* and *managing* is impacted when operating within these altered environments.

The next section will explore this aspect of public sector leadership and begin to review the field in relation to this postmodern era.

2.1.2 Leadership within the Public Sector

In 2003 Van Wart completed an extensive and noteworthy literature review of leaders and managers operating within the public sector (Van Wart, 2003). Through this review it became clear that the treatment of administrative or “bureaucratic” leadership within the scholarly community has been largely neglected, with few empirical studies of leadership within the last six decades undertaken (Van Wart, 2003). Where deeper understanding and enquiry has occurred, it has been a fraction of what has emerged in comparison to the study of leadership within the private sector (Van Wart, 2003). The neglect of study surrounding leadership within public organizations is deeply problematic given the critical importance that leadership holds throughout all forms of organizations. As Van Wart (2003) contends:

“In organizations, effective leadership provides higher-quality and more efficient goods and services; it provides a sense of cohesiveness, personal development, and higher

levels of satisfaction among those conducting the work; and it provides an overarching sense of direction and vision, an alignment with the environment, a healthy mechanism for innovation and creativity, and a resource for invigorating the organizational culture.” (Van Wart, 2003; pg. 214)

Part of the problem, which may account for this limited enquiry related to the study of leadership within the public sector, may center more around issues with “practice.” For example, Van Wart (2003) has identified an array of difficulties and limitations that exist with attempts to study leading and managing including aspects of “contextual complexity” that are associated with variations in organizational cultures, structures, mission and types of problems found within public sector agencies. There are also normative issues associated with arriving at commonly accepted definitions and terms along with the inability of being able to generalize within the context of social science research (Van Wart, 2003; Dahl, 1947). Yet, despite this dearth of scholarly enquiry, what is in no way diminished is the need for deeper and more meaningful understanding of what it means to effectively lead and manage within these contexts. This need is underscored through the insight gleaned from other scholars that suggest that there is much reason to believe that leading within the public sector is more complex and distinct from the private sphere which warrants additional and specialized enquiry in and of itself. Teelken et al (2012) references this reality when they state:

“Compared to the private sector, a different and more complex set of pressures and obligations plays a role, involving a focus on processes and skills that implies much more than formal leadership only. In addition, public organizations have to deal with a complex system of rules and programs, which require a considerable amount of knowledge. More specifically, public sector leaders have to cope with a complexity and ambiguity of power that is dispersed throughout the whole political and administrative context. “ (Teelken, Ferlie & Dent, 2012; pg. 5)

In many respects, the call for further enquiry into leading and managing is grounded within studies of organizational design and the evolving template of public sector restructuring referenced previously. The research that has been undertaken regarding management has been mostly centered on studies of how to best manage and lead individual organizations that fell under a ‘hierarchical’ structure where there was only one set of actors in place (Milward & Provan, 2003). This predominant view as to the critical importance of leadership as carrying out the work of the agency through

‘hierarchy’ or ‘bureaucracy’ accounted for the previous research that almost exclusively focused on *intra-organizational* leadership (Morse & Buss, 2007; Van Wart, 2005). In essence, the focus of such leadership through the intra-organizational lens is situated around the belief that effectiveness in leading public sectors was more due to the *executive phenomenon* associated with leading *within* organization and their hierarchical arrangements.

The framework centering on the hierarchy is problematic alongside the organizational redesign that has accompanied the post-industrial age and the transformations associated therein. For example, Schneider (2002) identifies the “managerial logic” of the leader’s role and the leader’s “role set” within the context of the traditional organizational era centering on the players or actors under the direct control of the organization itself. Within the context of public service modernization, the focus of this “logic” or “role-set” must shift as it centers on the *human agency* aspect of the organization (O’Reilly & Reed, 2011). Central to the organizational change that is evolving is movement from bureaucracy towards new organizational forms. Schneider (2002) has termed this the *radix organization* which contrasts that of the bureaucratic form. The unfolding transformation within organizations is leading to developments that include expanded structures that, at their core, are examples of collaborations between entities or *actors*. These collaborations are leading to necessary alterations within organizations in order to respond appropriately to the fundamental changes brought along with the way in which work is carried out by a wider net or cast of actors both inside and outside of the system. Thus, the managerial logic and role set have been transformed necessitating a renewed view of leadership.

At a fundamental level, arrangements that include contracting, outsourcing, or simply any form that engages actors from outside of the organizational system holds considerable potential for enhancing or improving quality and performance for the delivery of goods and services. However, ‘interjection’ from outside of the organization, (whether it be private, profit or non-profit) for the purposes of aiding the public sector organization carries risks for waste and the deterioration of overall service that the sector aims to

provide (Brown & Potoski, 2005). When there is a ‘reorientation’ of the organization due to arrangements involving actors from outside of the system, there can be substantial costs if these arrangements are not managed effectively (Smith & Lipsky, 1993; Milward & Provan, 2003). If the work of the external actor is left unmonitored, the arrangement has the potential for oversight and coordination to be provided exclusively by the service provider and not the leadership of the organization within which the work is carried out (Milward & Provan, 2003). Consequently, these arrangements emerge as managerial issues that must be addressed with arrangements involving collaborations and non-system actors described as critical managerial problems (Milward & Provan, 2003).

2.1.3 Leadership and Management within Public Sector Collaborations

While research regarding collaborations in organizations has been a topic of study since the 1970s, and there is a growing research base around collaborations and networks within the literature, the issue of leadership and management within collaborative ventures has been largely overlooked and not been an extensive area of focus (Silvia, 2011; Silva & McGuire, 2010; Rethemeyer & Hatmaker, 2008). As outlined in the previous section, the research that has been undertaken has been mostly centered on studies of how to best manage and lead individual organizations that fell under a ‘hierarchical’ structure where there was only one set of actors in place (Milward & Provan, 2003). These limitations, in terms of unpacking and understanding leadership in alternative post-modern organizational forms, is problematic in that the scholarship in this area is vital given that leadership is critical to advancing the capacity of the organization working within a network or collaborative arrangement (Wise; 2006).

There has been some movement in recent years within the field that is calibrating the focus within public agency scholarship. For example, Morse and Buss (2007) suggests that *collaboration*, *collaborative governance*, *collaborative public management* and *network management* have begun to shift the paradigm within public administration scholarship with an emphasis away from the management *of* public organizations to management and leadership *across* organizations. Situated within this inquiry also includes a central notion of expanding aspects of *governance*.

The notion of governance has adopted a variety of definitions within the public administration literature. Arganoff and McGuire (2003) have suggested that central to these notions is the involvement of multiple organizations interconnected to carry out public purpose. Morse (2008) suggests that it is a term that refers to the steering of the public's business by-way of a collective accomplishment of many actors. And Frederickson and Smith (2003) position governance as overseeing the lateral and inter-institutional relations in public administration. Underscoring all of these conceptions is the critical fact that leadership plays an important role in the success or failure of collaborative endeavors (Morse, 2008). More importantly, leadership within collaborations is different from traditional notions of leadership and thus, Morse (2008) argues that there are additional competencies required for effectively leading and managing across organizations.

While these new forms or arrangements have evolved, researchers have simply not tried to empirically detail the *competencies, skills and behaviors* which may constitute appropriate leadership and management practices within these collaborative organizational arrangements. To some degree, with an apparent thin line of research within the literature and scholarly community, seeking to anchor existing or applicable leadership theories to these forms of governing emerges as an important offering in an effort to try and expand the enquiry and understanding within these realms. The section that follows will briefly review of some of the existing leadership theories that are emerging in the research community as a plausible means within which to tether this understanding as part of future scholarly enquiry.

2.1.4 Theoretical Foundations within Collaborative Governance Structures

The emerging need for new theoretical foundations and theories by which to contextualize leading and managing within the post-industrial era has been recognized for over a decade now. As one of the dominant leading thinkers around leadership, Drucker (1998) acknowledged this need in the late 1990s:

“As we advance deeper in the knowledge economy, the basic assumptions underlying much of what is taught and practiced in the name of management are hopelessly out of date...Most of our assumptions about business, technology and organization are at least 50 years old. They have outlived their time.” (Drucker, 1998 as quoted in Uhl-Bein, Marion & McKelvey, 2007; p. 162)

Yet despite the importance of leadership studies in general, and the need for a broader understanding of leadership within a variety of contexts, there is little that addresses or expands ideas associated with leadership models that are applicable within this “Knowledge Era” (Uhl-Bein, Marion & McKelvey 2007).

There are some exceptions within the literature that have begun to provide possible frameworks in which to advance an understanding of this complex task of providing *integrative or inter-organizational* leadership where leading and managing actors from both within and outside of the organization emerges. In the section below, some of these theories and models will be briefly explored.

Inter-Agency Collaborations Across Organizational Boundaries

In capturing the complexity of the management and leadership skills of the public manager or leader who holds responsibility for leading *inter-agency* collaborations, Williams (2002) has advanced a framework with core elements hinging largely upon competency-based variables as the means through which collaborative engagements or arrangements are influenced through management. The importance of these attributes is underscored by Williams (2002):

“...relational and inter-personal attributes designed to build social capital. They will build cultures of trust, improve levels of cognitive ability to understand complexity and be able to operate within non-hierarchical environments with dispersed configurations of power relationships.” (Williams, 2002; pg. 106).

The core elements of this framework are illustrated below in figure 2.3 which help conceptualize the inter-connections amongst these various dimensions.

Figure 2.1 Collaborative Management Across Boundaries
(Adapted from Williams, 2002)



In a similar view of managing and leading across boundaries, Crosby and Bryson (2005) have advanced a framework that also focuses more exclusively on organizational leadership (as opposed to merely competency-based variables), which they have identified as a “*Leadership for the Common Good*” framework. The aspects of this framework are noted below and include eight capabilities for public domain leadership when ‘shared’ leadership is in place. These capabilities, along with a brief description of each, are outlined in Table 2.2:

Table 2.2 Leadership in Shared Contexts

<i>Leadership Capabilities</i>	<i>Description</i>
Leadership in context	Understanding the social, political, economic & technological ‘givens.’
Personal Leadership	Understanding self and others.
Team Leadership	Building productive work groups.
Organizational Leadership	Nurturing humane and effective organizations
Visionary Leadership	Creating and communicating shared meaning in forums.
Political Leadership	Making and implementing decisions in legislative, executive and administrative arenas.
Ethical Leadership	Adjudicating disputes and sanctioning conduct in courts.
Policy Entrepreneurships	Coordinating leadership takes over the course of policy change cycles.

(Crosby & Bryson, 2005)

It is important to note that this framework applies to situations where no one individual is actually in charge and power and decision-making is distributed across multiple sectors or organizations (Silva & McGuire, 2010). Such a structure may not always be applicable to situations where various arrangements with and between actors are in place, but the capabilities still seem appropriate to at least consider within the organizational contexts

of outsourcing, arrangements that engage non-system actors and formalized collaborations.

Public Network Management

In their work around public *network* management, Milward and Provan (2006) have focused on the necessary *tasks* that the effective leader must attend in order for the leaders to work effectively within these forms of arrangements. They distinguish between *tasks* as different than *capabilities* as the means through which organizational effectiveness can be influenced via the insertion of leading and management oversight of such collaborative arrangements. An overview of these tasks, aligned with a brief description of the aspects involved in the execution of these from the perspective of the organizational leader, are reflected in table 2.3:

Table 2.3 Tasks Associated with Public Network Management

<i>Tasks</i>	<i>What Is Involved</i>
Management of Accountability	Determining who is responsible for outcomes & rewarding compliance with network goals.
Management of Legitimacy	Publicizing network accomplishments & attracting resources
Conflict Management	Incorporation of mechanisms that resolve disputes and align decisions with network goals.
Management of Design	Determining appropriate structural governance forms
Managing Commitment	Securing buy-in; ensuring network resources are distributed evenly

(Milward & Provan, 2006)

Milward and Provan's selection of terms has some element of dispute in that the application of 'management and leadership' are felt to be more aligned with describing single agency settings. However, Silva and McGuire (2010) contend that this framework, and the terms associated therein, are applicable to integrative leadership of public networks as their categorization can be considered *organization-oriented* behaviors similar to the work undertaken in a single-agency framework.

Essentially, the framework of network management studies seek to discern whether there are differences in approaches, skills, or behaviors these forms of arrangements have on

organizational operations and, thus, on organizational leadership. In a broader sense, public sector outsourcing, or collaborations through formalized arrangements, gives rise to the importance of assessing whether or not there are important implications for the administrator who holds responsibility for leading and managing the organization within the context of this postmodern era (Scott & DiMartino, 2009; Lubienski, 2005). As Rethemeyer and Hatmaker (2008) have noted:

“...studies of “network management” are designed to better understand the unique challenges of operating in a context where bureaucracy no longer provides the primary tool for “social steering.” (Rethemeyer & Hatmaker, 2008, pg. 617).

Furthermore, the need to assess and understand leadership through this context of network management is associated with the actual shift associated with the displacement of vertical management through these lateral ties throughout the organization. As public sector leaders become immersed within government reform there emerges a newfound form of leadership necessary to execute the work of the department and/or organizations (Teelken et al, 2012).

Stakeholder Model of Organizational Leadership

The stakeholder model of organizational leadership is one that has taken shape around predicting leadership effectiveness within organizational structures that are characterized by flattened hierarchies and structural relationships where contracts are in place as organizational ties instead of the bonds of employment.

As Schneider (2002) asserts:

“ Stakeholder theory is drawn upon as the basis for the new nonhierarchical conceptualization of leadership, referred to as the stakeholder model of organizational leadership, as stakeholders may include those inside the firm or outside of it, with no assumption of managerial authority over stakeholders. “ (Schneider, 2002; pg. 210)

One key aspect of this theory is that stakeholders may include those either inside or outside of the firm or organization where it is implied that managerial authority is not assumed. But what does emerge as a key aspect of this model, and relevant to the inquiry

herein, is the fact that a leader's role-set expands, concomitantly leading to a reduction in authority yet greater role complexity (Schneider, 2002).

In these organizational forms, the role of authority emerges as a central point of consideration in that authority flows differently in a flattened structure as opposed to a hierarchical one and the use of power serves as a guide for *cooperation* rather than *direction*. In other words, the leader must execute his/her skills in a way that leads these stakeholders, which could be contract works, outsourcing functions or strategic alliances even in the absence of traditional power and influence. As Schneider contends:

“Effective leaderships (within these arrangements) requires the cognitive ability to make keen assessment of relative legitimacy, power and urgency of stakeholders....and must possess significant cognitive, emotional, and behavioral abilities to cope with their complex environments.” (Schneider, 2002; pg. 217).

The application of stakeholder theory to that of organizational leadership is grounded in the conceptualization of individuals and groups with varying relationships with the organization (Schneider, 2012). In as much as the fact that stakeholders are considered social actors, Clarkson (1995) suggests the fact that they can be applied both to individuals and organizations and is therefore applicable to domains associated with leadership and management. As Schneider (2002) contends:

“Authority, or organizationally sanctioned power, continues to be required in organizations to promote the cooperation necessary for goal achievement. As organizations become more flexible and place more emphasis on lateral and inter-organizational relationships, the concept of authority is adapting to reflect these relationships.” (Schneider, 2002; pg. 218).

2.1.5 Summary

As a result of the larger overarching pressures in society for continual achievement and improvement, and often in response to the fiscal or budgetary tensions within which organizations have to respond, there is an increasing tendency for public organizations to look beyond their walls for assistance to aid in the delivery of necessary services. The structural reconfigurations of organizational design and service delivery are beginning to

transform the ‘orientation’ of the organization that operates within this space where partnerships and collaborative ties lead to a variation of the internal processes that unfold.

Organizational environments that include the engagement of actors from outside of the organization represent a new challenge for leaders as they seek to provide the organization with leadership and management. Similar to the state government that contracts out services, organizations that pursue this path must coordinate and oversee not only their own internal operations but also the operations and activities of these actors from outside of the system to ensure that there is a sustained provision of services that align with the needs the parent organization seeks (Milward & Provan, 2003). It is as a result of these tensions that Brown and Potoski (2005) have identified a critical need of managing and leading the actual service/product delivery following the establishment of the contract and the introduction of the non-system actor into the system.

Brown and Potoski (2005) have previously contended that within the field of public administration leaders in these roles have struggled to consistently be as systematic or deliberate in their ability to manage, oversee and lead both the organization as well as the contracting process. This is problematic given the shift in structural arrangements accompanying post-modern organizational design that pursues inter-organizational capacity and the need for the application of *collaborative public management* as a means to survival (Morse, 2007). Ultimately, understanding effectiveness within this realm from the perspective of the leader emerges as critically important. Of course, attempts to discern ‘effectiveness’ is a rather illusive concept that necessitates a very deep and deliberate effort to ascertain approaches that are reproducible under the same conditions in different contexts – a near impossibility when considering the factors associated with the human condition and variations in context. Thus, while pursuit of understanding effectiveness in terms of managing and leading non-system actors as a public sector leader might be illusive, capturing that which is felt to be necessary and appropriate under certain circumstances based upon first-hand perspectives is more of a possibility and within reason.

The section that follows will shift its focus from the broader public sector in general to the narrower focus on public education and local school district leadership.

2.2 U.S. School Districts

Establishing a context for the school district as it is situated within the public education setting in the U.S. is a necessary aspect of an enquiry that explores areas of leadership and related activity focused around leading and managing within these organizations. The first section that follows provides briefly examines the changing template of school district organization and will set the stage for such investigation. The second section briefly considers collaborations and non-system actors within the context of the public education system. The final section explores why the perceptions of district leaders even matter in the course of such scholarly activity and provides some closing thoughts on the implications for research.

2.2.1 The U.S. School District in Context

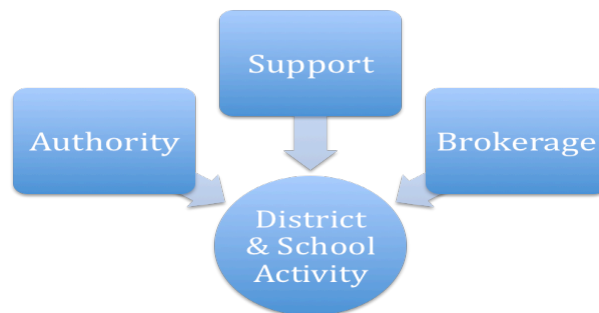
As organizations, school districts play a critical role in the governance of public education systems in the U.S. and serve as the dominant structure around which such systems are organized (Levin et al, 2012). The U.S. Census Bureau describes school districts as public school systems which provide regular, special and/or vocational educational services for students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. These systems are locally administered, establish a ‘network’ of corresponding schools within a set of particular boundaries, and maintain a geographic structure that varies in its configuration across states and even within states (Hightower et al, 2002). In some parts of the country districts range in size from a few hundred students to tens of thousands and responsibility for schools under the district’s authority span anywhere from one to hundreds of schools. Nevertheless, regardless of an exacting definition or scope in size, public school districts are a dominant fixture in both the U.S. educational system and its economy totaling more than 14,000 in number and spending more than \$500 billion combined on public education every year (Hightower et al, 2002).

Role of School Districts:

Inside the operational ‘box’ of these organizations, there have been attempts to define the wide-range of responsibilities for which the school district (and thus school district leaders) are responsible. For example, Hightower et al (2002) have identified core responsibilities and a range of functions of districts that include: monitoring the attendance of students enrolled with the district; establishing instructional related goals through a strategic planning process; managing the personnel and overall operations of the district and; overseeing the curriculum, professional development and training of staff. Applying a slightly different framework, Supovitz (2008) has characterized the historic roles which school districts fulfill as encompassing three aspects: i) *authority*, where schools are held accountable for their performance; ii) *support*, where the district helps build capacity and; iii) *brokerage*, where expertise, services supplies and materials are mediated between the teacher, schools and the providers who are external to the organization. Figure 2.1 conceptualizes these roles as advanced by Supovitz (2008) and their connection to the activity of the schools situated within the district.

Figure 2.2 The Role of the School District

(Adapted from Supovitz , 2008)



On a ‘micro’ level, Supovitz (2008) has expanded a conceptualization of the range of instructional support functions that districts provide and oversee on a daily basis in support of teaching and learning which include:

- Coordination of curriculum and instructional materials;
- Oversight, provision and coordination of professional development;
- Monitoring program implementation;

- Organization of performance data to inform instruction and decision making;
- Securing materials, programs and practices to bring into the system to support instruction;
- Facilitating networks between schools as a means to share and disseminate knowledge and;
- Serve as a coherer of programs and resources.

In large part, these roles have emerged as fundamental responsibilities which the typical school district provides and center around supporting the work of the schools within its realm of authority while facilitating teaching and learning that transpires therein. Furthermore, these responsibilities have largely been overseen and provided through the utilization of local funding resources to purchase products and/or hire staff to deliver the necessary services. As a result, the typical school district in the U.S. includes a wide-range of responsibilities irrespective of its size, the social diversity of its students, the level of funding the district receives from its local tax base, or the socio-economic status of the community which it serves.

The School District and Educational Reform:

Beyond the actual role and function that the school district holds within the public education system, the district's position in relation to education reform has undergone a transformation over time.

Historically, within the school effectiveness literature, notions connected with reform for overall instructional improvement centered almost exclusively on the teaching and learning that occurred within the classroom. Beyond the classroom, the literature itself evolved to then closely tie student success with the overall success of the schoolhouse. Consequently, it is of little surprise that traditional notions of educational effectiveness minimized the role that the district played and led to it being viewed as unimportant to the work that unfolded in classrooms (Hightower et al, 2002).

Attention within the research community regarding the school district and its import has intensified throughout the last few decades with a focus on their emergence as a key

instructional actor in the reform process (Anderson, 2003; Rorer et al, 2008 Hightower et al, 2002). This intensification has largely been evident as a result of a handful of studies that underscore the linkage between school district effectiveness and the impact on student learning (i.e. see Elmore & Burney, 1997; Hightower, 2001). There has consequently been a transformation within the field as it has become increasingly understood that student success is more closely aligned with not only an effective teacher situated within an effective school, but also as a result of the work of an effective district. As Hightower et al (2002) note:

“Many foundations, reform organizations and policy makers have placed new confidence in the central role districts assume in improving teaching and learning. In addition, researchers have produced work on district efforts to support students and teachers, bring coherence to an easily fragmented policy environment, and promote equity across a system of schools.” (Hightower et al, 2002; pg.1)

As a result, the place of importance that the school district holds within the educational reform literature has expanded. The focus has been re-positioned around those individuals who provide leadership at the level of the school organization, with school district leadership and districts as a whole transforming their perception and moving from *“...being perceived as a bureaucratic backwater of educational policy to being seen as potent sites and sources of education reform”* (Hightower et al 2002; pg. 1).

The Changing Template of the U.S. School District:

Meyer, Scott and Strang (1987) have described the “template” of U.S. public education in the nineteenth and better part of the early twentieth century as one which included strong local control that predominantly reflected a decision-making structure which included oversight held by those that are directly a part of, and involved with, the system. This structure was legitimized around professional autonomy with the appointment of professionals to actively lead a system largely comprised of local actors as primary employees of the organization (Sunderman, 2010). Sunderman (2010) has previously stated that these systems revolved around a prevailing model of governance that included professionals as the *organizational providers* of necessary services where local control

and administration dominated the landscape (Meyer et al, 1987; Davies & Hentschke, 2002).

Similarly to the activity unfolding in other public sectors, needs confronting public education system have increasingly necessitated that district leaders pursue assistance and support from actors outside of the system to meet the wider needs of students, staff and programs (Supovitz, 2008). This structural shift includes both private and public firms, existing as *actors* with origins outside of the institution who are entering the ‘space’ of K-12 public education to aid in the provision of services, expertise and sometimes management related to instruction, teaching and learning (Honig, 2009; Coburn, 2005; Cucchiara et al, 2011; Bartlett et al, 2002; Whitty & Power, 2000).

At last three factors have undergirded these organizational transformations within the wider sector of public educational institutions. First, the typical district leader’s role includes some form of managerial and instructional support responsibilities. As the demands around both areas of responsibility have increased, becoming an expert in both realms is increasingly challenging via the demands placed on the public education system in contemporary times. With a heightened need of expertise within specific areas, districts have turned to external support providers for assistance that targets specific areas (Supovitz, 2008). Second, as budgetary constraints have increased, districts have looked for reinforcement from external educational providers to effectively and efficiently support the broad array of services that students and schools increasingly require (Supovitz, 2008). Ultimately, this amounts to the classic ‘make or buy’ analogy that equates to a decision making process that examines whether it is more or less expensive to provide or deliver the service through the cultivation of in-house employees or to contract out. And third, educational policy has stimulated, and even promoted, these new arrangements between districts and firms outside of the organization as a means to improving social outcomes (Burch, 2009; Sunderman 2010; Cucchiara, 2011).

While these and other factors may undergird the recent shifts that are leading to these transformations within public education systems, there are at the same time ramifications

for the proliferation of such alterations in how the business of the agency is carried out. For example, Whitty and Power (2000) assert that recent attempts that have brought increasing marketization and privatization via the engagement of non-system actors with existing state funded public education systems are, in effect, leading to the dismantling of centralized bureaucracies that have tended to be the norm of organizational design. Lubienski (2005) has similarly argued that this overhaul, where partnerships with private and for-profit entities are aiding in the delivery of services, has led to a devolution of the system and in effect amount to the beginning alteration off the *template* that has historically defined educational governance in public education in the U.S. This reconfiguration includes the management of public sector collaboration vis a vi arrangements with multi-actors that involve both actors from the school district itself as well as those non-system actors representative of non-system actors with individuals, agencies and firms from outside of the district.

Similar to the proliferation of formalized partnerships, cross sector or inter-organizational collaborations and outsourcing within the broader public sector, these forms of arrangements are now increasingly penetrating the walls of public education to the point where they are becoming so pronounced that these arrangements are being described as a *cultural norm* and as a form of *being* for the institution of and within public education (Ball, 2009). In many parts of the world similar shifts are underway which are bringing in the private sector in the form of outside providers (or non-system actors). These non-system actors are ultimately positioned to assist in the provision of services, expertise and sometimes management as a collective effort to move away from the system where state funding and provision together configured what has traditionally been considered the accepted mode of delivery (Whitty & Power, 2000).

To be fair, public education in the U.S. has a long history of sharing ‘space’ and embraced arrangements that have seen private and public provision *co-mingled* in the delivery of public education (Cucchiara et al, 2011). Throughout the span of the twentieth century business or for-profit entities have operated and carried out business in numerous school districts as they have provided products, services or support to K-12 education

systems (Cucchiara et al, 2011). However, prior to the 1990s, this provision tended to center around non-instructional services which often included such things as food services, transportation, maintenance and operations. Arguably, the association with districts and outside providers centered on activities that were farther removed from the instructional core where a large part of the involvement was relatively far removed from teaching, learning or the activity which took place in the classroom with students (Bulkley & Burch, 2011; Burch, 2009). As a result, such activity was considered relatively inconsequential on the overall structure and system design with a limited intrusion on the prevailing governance structure.

However, confronted by the challenges and demands that have taken a firm hold on educational systems throughout the industrialized world, school districts have increasingly pursued arrangements with outside firms (sometimes private, public or non-profit) as an alternative management strategy to provide goods, services, and expertise. In effect, the pursuit of such arrangements amounts to *outsourcing* (or the contracting out of services) as a means to provide instructional related resources, whether in the form of staff, consultancy expertise or the provision of instructional and assessment materials. In fact, the reality is that the educational sector has seen considerable growth in the last decade of growing and expanding partnerships with private entities that have included specialty services. This growth and expansion associated with the infusion of interconnections with providers outside of public education is considerable with some reports of schools and local governments now spending approximately 48 billion dollars per year to purchase products as well as services from the private sector (Burch, 2009). While it is important to note that not all forms of collaborative arrangements that include non-system actors are aligned with ‘private’ and/or for-profit entities, there is nevertheless an undercurrent which equally applies to attempts to better understand these forms of arrangements that involve any other entities with ‘public’ organizations.

Chubb and Moe (1990) have attempted to outline the gravitation or pull of the public educational system towards the private sector and have observed that:

“By positioning schools to behave more like private-sector entities such as businesses, structural changes can bring some of the organizational attributes associated with such entities – qualities like efficiency, innovativeness, responsiveness, effectiveness, and coherence of vision – into the (now expanded) publicly funded sector (Chubb & Moe, 1990 quoted in Lubienski, 2005; pg. 468).

Undergirding these organizational forms however is also a larger central point of concern as it relates to the impact on the role of the leader via these structural reconfigurations of the organization. The net result is that this norm has begun to form a new identity for the leadership of the organization (Ball, 2009; Burch, 2009). Specifically, non-system actors are ‘entering’ through the ‘walls’ of the bounded public education sector and conducting business ‘inside’ the system. In turn, this calls for a re-tooling of the organization with a new way of governing and new forms of knowledge necessary to make them work (Ball, 2009). Thus, not only is the organizational template of the public education system beginning to transform, but the ramifications of such alterations also hold the potential to impact the inner-workings of the environment, including the roles that individual *system-actors* play in the organization.

2.2.3 School District Leadership

Contemporary Role of School District Leaders

Within the U.S. public education context, local school districts are largely ruled by a democratic process and governed by locally elected officials. These elected officials often have wide ranging authority to establish their own local curriculum, graduation requirements and the selection of instructional materials. In order to carry out and ‘deliver’ on these necessary operations of the district, these same elected officials have tended to position professionals in control in order to govern the K-12 education system (Tyack; 2002). This structure of professional regulation was largely implemented in an effort to establish a ‘barrier’ between school governance structures (i.e. school boards or committees), those organizational ‘actors’ that carry forth the work in the district and to mediate the influence of politics and interest groups in the surrounding environment. This control takes the form of essentially two layers of leadership: at the building level in the form of school or building administrators, including principals and assistant principals

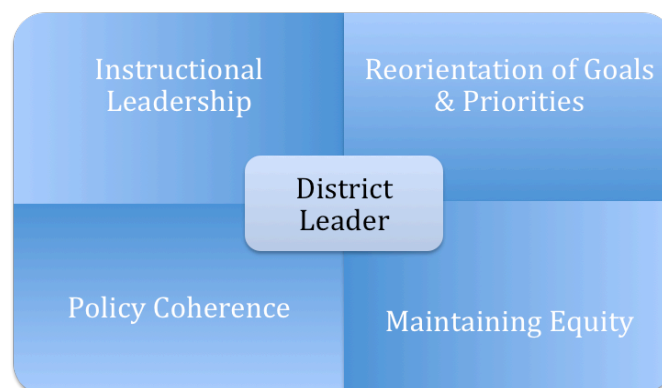
and; at the school district office in the form leaders who serve at the district level overseeing the operations of the entire district.

It is worth noting that earlier conceptions of the role and position of the school district leader have been less well understood. While there is extensive literature that supports the structures, programs and processes that bring about instructional improvement at the school level, far less is known about how leaders approach this work, or how these arrangements are negotiated and maintained, at the district level (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001; Coburn et al, 2008). To a large extent, this has revolved around a limited focus in the literature on the role that they play given that these leaders were felt to be inconsequential to the long-term improvement of teaching and learning, and the educational experiences provided, for the students the district serves. However, the focus on the district leader's role has also been transformed within the recent era that has identified the place of importance that the district as an organization entity holds in overall system and educational improvement.

Rorrer, Skrla and Scheurich (2008) have attempted to conceptually 'anchor' the activity of the district leader to the role of the school district through the identification of four roles of districts as witnessed through the research and illustrated in Figure 2.2 below:

Figure 2.3 Role of School District Leaders

(Adapted from Rorrer, Skrla & Scheurich, 2008)



Collectively, these roles of providing instructional leadership, establishing policy coherence, ensuring equity and establishing goals and priorities are interdependent. They

also help serve as a framework for school district leadership and these institutional actors engaged in the process of school system improvement (Rorrer et al, 2008).

Cuban (1988) has identified three areas of responsibility for the district leader. The first responsibility was termed *Administrative Chief* which centers on directing the district towards maximizing their productivity and efficiency. The second responsibility is that of the *Negotiator-Statesmen* and centers around political and public-relations aspects of the jobs. The third area of responsibility includes acting as the *Instructional Supervisor* with an applied focus around supporting, navigating and leading the instructional activity in the classroom (Cuban, 1988 as noted in Supovitz, 2008).

Levin et al (2012) has identified a broad spectrum of responsibilities for the school district leader including oversight of the students and staff the district serves; supervision of programs provided for students and; setting the culture and priorities of the district as an organizational whole (Levin et al, 2012). Aligned with this work and the respective responsibilities includes oversight of the budget and the necessary task of ensuring that there is the effective distribution of resources to achieve district goals and priorities.

Agullard and Goughnour (2006) suggest that the school superintendent and other key central office staff must embrace a consistent, systemic approach that must center their work and the focus of the district on a coherent theory of action. Such a focus is not only centered on the process of school change but, equally important, the actual role of the central office leadership in that process (Agullard & Goughnour, 2006).

As a result, the central office leader needs to walk the ‘fine line’ between micro managing and leading and where he/she provides unified direction while facilitating an alignment between goals and strategies and the specific resources and programs employed to help realize these. Consequently, the leadership that the school district administrator provides helps guide the work of the district and ties together the work of the schools so as to ensure that each school does not feel adrift, or operates in isolation from, the district as a whole (Agullard & Goughnour, 2006). In reality, just as there are

many routes to school improvement, there are many routes to district-wide improvement as well. However, central office staff have to adopt and pursue roles both individually and collectively to support change to implement the identified structures (Agullard & Goughnour, 2006). In a general sense, school districts, and thus, district leaders, assume the role of authority in holding schools accountable for their performance and making the key decisions that guide the district's work.

It is worth noting that the level of discretion and latitude in decision-making provided to district actors has also been contested (Anderson, 2003; Rorer et al; 2008 Hightower et al, 2002). Some observers have noted that given the application of the conceptual definition, districts are merely *implementers* of laws, regulations and policies established at either the state or federal level (Hightower et al, 2002). At the same time, there are those who have identified a larger role and place of importance of the district leader:

"...district are leaders and implementers, interpreters and originators of educational policies. As active agents in a busy environment, districts make policies and exercise leadership while simultaneously mediating forces and conditions on the community, state and national scene." (Hightower et al, 2002; pg. 2).

Thus, despite past claims that the school district, and the district leader's role, may be minimal and only superficial in executing certain aspects of the organization, the fact remains that in the U.S. public system of education considerable authority and power continues to rest and revolve around the local school district and the ability of these organizations to exercise influence over the schools and their policies (Corcoran & Lawrence, 2003). The demands of external accountability from both the state and federal levels, and various other demand associated with educational reform, has made the demands for leadership throughout the system everyone's responsibility from teacher to building principal up to and including the central office administrator (Childress, 2007).

Collaborations and Leadership within the Context of the School District

Alongside the reformations associated with the changing template of the public school district, there are ramifications on leading and managing at this level of the system. A

vital job emerges for the district leader as it relates to the role of mediator between those actors outside of the system who enter into arrangements to provide services with those internal actors that are employees of the district (or *system* actors). In large part, the issue is not so much the dispute of what value an outside actor can bring to the organization, but rather how these services align with the existing dominant culture and organizational structure. Consequently, supporting formalized collaborations to carry out the necessary and important work of the school district amounts to more than simply varying the structural arrangements of the district's operations. In fact, helping lead and manage these large, complex organizations alongside these collaborative arrangements with outside providers (but within the context of a school district) reflects a 'new normal' for central office administration that is a departure from "administration-as-usual" (Honig, 2003). There is a role that the district leader must play in terms of guiding the organization on both a micro and macro level in terms of mediating these "outside in" processes. The need for attention to this notion is underscored by Tyack (2002):

"School districts need to be open to new currents of educational thought and promising practices. They can learn from expert outsiders. But districts, with their elected boards of professional staffs, also need to balance the cosmopolitan and the local, the traditional and the new, by relating educational programs to the goals and experience of local communities." (Tyack; pg. 22)

Furthermore, this new normalcy emerges as critically important for as Tyack (2002) argues:

"...successful mediation (between system and non-system actors) and deliberation can ...produce greater coherence in goals, healthier morale among professionals, and more trust between communities and their schools. Lay and professional leaders in school districts can do much to enhance coherence, morale, and trust – or the opposite -teachers can feel infantilized or respected, collegial or alienated, depending on the dominant climate of values sustained at the district level." (Tyack, 2002; pg. 23)

The importance of the role of the leader in terms of mediating these dynamics is also evident in consideration of the larger forces associated with the marketization of public education that Burch has written about previously. As Burch (2009) argues, the dynamic of marketization of public education modifies the traditional role of the public agency which traditionally oversees, manages and controls the vision and values of the

organization. Specifically, such activity leads to the district's role becoming highly technical (i.e. through performativity and contract management) with the substance of the work molded by the outside firm. This notion is echoed by Hentschke and Wohlstetter (2007) who argue that business motives, and an accompanying ethos, are replacing the professional motives and values of public educators. And Kakabadse and Kakabadse (2001) position these trends in outsourcing, where the market enters the domain of the public sector, necessitate a re-engineering of public services and the leadership that guides these services therein.

At one level, a school district undergoes a recalibration of its organizational design when the district purchases things such as professional development, consultancy, training, support and program services. Ball (2009) argues that such activity, which actively engages the market in this manner, creates a situation that amounts to the *sale* of educational policy in ways not dissimilar to the sale of any other product, commodity or service. However, the impact of this transaction, where policy is in effect *bought* and *sold*, leads to developments where the district is no longer in a position to mediate or regulate its own policy and affairs. In effect, the market, and the for-profit businesses therein, assume the role of determining, directing and managing the discourse around policy for the school district and organization. As Bulkley and Burch (2011) contend:

“When school districts purchase products and services from firms...they are in essence hiring private firms to act as critical extensions of educationally central policy processes – to set preferences for what educational outcomes matter, to track educational outcomes, and to design interventions based on these outcomes.” (Bulkley & Burch, 2011; p. 241).

On one side, the impact on the organizational culture is affected through the commitments to the organization itself. With greater individuality amongst the actors who hold responsibility for the delivery of service, there is less affinity or natural connection to the organization. Ball (2009b) has previously argued that through this re-tolling the structure of the district becomes more of a ‘net’ of ‘service relationships’ which are linked through contractual, performance and ‘promissory’ commitments that educational leaders have to navigate. Consequently, what emerges as of most interest is

what Bryson et al (2006) has identified as normative and regulatory elements of the process and arrangement as a central thread that runs through these is the need for the arrangement to both confirm and achieve legitimacy within the organization itself.

In summary, there has been a transformation within the literature and educational community regarding the place of importance that the school district leader holds in educational reform and the work of influencing teaching and learning. This influence is manifested through the various roles of the leader at the district level, which include providing instructional leadership to the system, ensuring policy coherence, the establishment of system goals, and the role of maintaining equity. And while effectiveness in these roles is arguably demanding enough within the context of overseeing the people and programs within the organization, the demands become more challenging when districts are, in effect, “inviting in” outside actors to assist in work of the district. Consequently, what has developed around the leader serving at the district level is a structurally complex role that demands navigating policies, organizational values and preserving quality, efficacy and equity with and between the system as a whole, its actors and those non-system actors that are only operating in the district temporarily. On the one hand, school district leaders are required to ensure that normative policies are in place to pursue system goals and uphold values within an organizational structure that is expected to maintain quality, efficacy and equity. But, at the same time, due to mounting forces and pressures to meet ever expanding demands, the district leader needs to broker between the system itself and outside providers of services and materials who have been “invited in” to the district in order to pursue system goals (Supovitz, 2008).

2.3 An Argument for Seeking the Perceptions of District Leaders

From the standpoint of the public administration literature, public sector contracting and collaborative arrangements that span organizational boundaries necessitates a more theoretically informed framework in an effort to help guide and inform the practice of those responsible for leading these organizations (Brown & Potoski, 2005). Within the

field of public education, this perspective can be gained through the gathering of perceptions of district leaders regarding their experiences.

Coburn et al (2008) utilize the terms *insider-outsider partnerships* when referring to forms of collaborative working relationships. As they have so noted, the existing research that has been done has examined these arrangements at the school level. More informed and deeper enquiry has not addressed these forms of collaborations at the district central office level. As they note:

“This work has yet to investigate the dynamics of insider-outsider collaboration at the district central office level. The district central office is much more complex organizationally than a school. Decision-making at the district level is often stretched across multiple levels and multiple divisions, involving those with different authority. Studying insider-outsider partnerships at the district level thus creates the opportunity to more fully understand the role of organizational structure in influencing how collaborative efforts unfold.” (Coburn, Bae & Turner, 2008; pg. 366)

As a result, this study embraces the underlying notion that probing experiences, perceptions and beliefs of front-line leaders at the district level holds the potential to allow for the development of a deeper understanding in terms of what is both necessary and appropriate leadership when striving to lead and manage within these collaborative arrangements.

Such an effort to gather further insight from the district leader is also rooted in the call from the research field that identifies the need to better conceptualize the work of the school district leader and the impact of that work *in* and *throughout* the system. In reflecting upon a collection of case studies which sought to establish the link between school district improvement and teaching and learning, Hightower et al (2002) contend that:

“A larger task confronts educational leaders and scholars and those who wish to learn from these cases and imagine more powerful ways to guide teaching and learning from the district level. We need more powerful frameworks for conceptualizing what a district is and does, how thinking and action from the central office and school board can permeate the teaching environment.” (Hightower et al, 2002; pg. 6).

This study also falls into the domain of the “transformational era” within leadership and organizational studies where research attempts to examine the situational context in which leaders find themselves carrying out *routines of their practice* (Van Wart, 2003). The perception of those serving in leadership roles can serve of benefit to gather insight into the contextual aspects or factors of their work, within a given context, that can impact that which is deemed appropriate in a given situation.

2.4 Implications for Research

In response to the shift in structural orientation of public sectors towards greater reliance upon non-system actors to assist in the delivery of services, Frederickson and Smith (2003) contend that the study of public administration must shift toward the study of collaborative service delivery.

While the literature explores this type of activity and these arrangements to a larger degree in other sectors, an understanding about the impact on leadership in public education is relatively nonexistent.

“Much research on districts focuses on the formal policy system and does not attend to the vast terrain of private and nonprofit organizations, such as subject-area networks, reform organizations, and foundations, that collaborate with schools and the central office on instructional improvement. Over the past decade, the activity of these “non-system actors” has intensified (Rowan, 2000). Especially in decentralized school districts, schools often deal with outside organizations for services, such as staff development, rather than looking exclusively to the district for support.”(Burch, 2002; pg. 112).

Based upon arguments in other sectors that suggest that a primary goal of marketization is to facilitate a new ‘orientation’ for public sectors transforming the way in which they operate, a more thorough understanding of the impact that such activity has on the ‘institutional arrangements’ of public education from the standpoint of the governing structures becomes critical (Diefenbach, 2009; Burch, 2009).

The need for further empirical evidence in this area is also underscored by Cucchiara et al (2011):

“...the research is thin regarding how the market works through and in education including how the related market policies impact, change or alter the rules for participation, decision-making or resource allocation (Cucchiara et al, 2011).

Given the importance of this area of inquiry for the institutions that in effect comprise public education in the U.S., what is needed is the development of a broadened framework to help leaders, policy makers and researchers better understand the dynamics of these relationships. While proponents of such organizations often suggest that when the ‘market’ enters into the environment of public institutions it is merely a rearrangement of providers of services and goods, the fact is that market forces in public education represents far more than just the shifting of resources from the public to private for-profit firms (Burch, 2009). Apple (2004) argues that what is necessary is a deeper understanding of the forces and tensions within the field in order to make sense of the impact of such activity on the social structure of public schooling and the major players upon which these firms operate. These players, therefore, include system leaders charged with overseeing, mediating and leading the social structure of the institution.

2.5 Summary

This literature review provided insight into the fact that there are structural reconfigurations underway within both public and private sectors that involve partnerships and collaborations as a means to support organizational reform and improvement. These alterations in design bring with them new challenges for those providing leadership and management. At the same time, there has been minimal focus within the literature that has sought to better understand leading public organizations. The field of public administration literature has begun to advance some theoretical foundations to this area of study and include frameworks that focus on integrative and inter-organizational leadership. Central themes include the focus on the human agency of the organization and governance that pertains the lateral and inter-institutional relations.

The study of school districts and school district leadership has undergone its own transformation. Although earlier conceptions of educational reform were anchored solely

to the work underway within individual schools, contemporary study has included an intensified focus on the school district as a key actor in the reform movement. In essence, student success is tightly coupled to school success where the latter is ultimately successful when a part of an effective school district. However, while the importance of the district has taken hold within the literature, there has been little study of the important role that the leader of the school district plays in this work. Mirroring the broader public sector, school district activity is also seeing an increase in collaborative arrangements to carry out the work of the district. However, also with parallels to the public administration field, there has been minimal attempt of seeking a deeper understanding of the school district leader and their work in a structurally complex role that necessitates navigating policies, organizational values and preserving efficacy and equity of the district. Given the critically important work that school systems are asked to engage in, there emerges a clear need to contribute to the dearth of research in the field and develop a deeper understanding of the school district leader's role in navigating the dynamics of their work within this environment.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research methods used in the present study. The research aim and questions are described along with the research design, the methodology employed to conduct the study and the data analysis used.

3.1 Research Philosophy

Advancing the knowledge base within public education is vital to the sustainability of the sector and elevating the contributions that it can make to future generations of students and communities. Given that research is critical in advancing our understanding of organizational behavior the study of such also becomes invaluable to help guide leadership behavior (Anderson, 1990). Thus, if through rationale enquiry there can be a deeper sense of understanding which can be applied to other contexts beyond what was directly observed through research (such as within the present study) then research has the utility it its ability to inform and guide further action. It also holds the potential, as Anderson (1990) suggests, to extend theory and develop further lines of question to probe deeper into issues.

3.2 Aim of the Study

In consideration of the gaps in the literature surrounding leading and managing within school district collaborations, my primary research aim was to investigate the nature of appropriate leadership and management practices as conceptualized by school district leaders operating within collaborative arrangements that engage non-system actors in the work of the district. A distinction is made here in terms of deliberating using the term appropriate as opposed to *effective* due to the fact that the former concept seems more ‘accessible’ and representative of what is possible to ascertain within such a research endeavor. Notions of *effectiveness* seem more illusive and immeasurable give the limitations of the enquiry.

A secondary aim of the study was to analyze how relevant leadership theories and/or models can inform an understanding of the practices of leading and managing within collaborative organizational arrangements situated within public education. If such leadership models or theories can reasonably be used in the study of such activity, this could also hold the potential for the use of the school district setting as one where collaborative leadership can be further studied in efforts to contribute to this realm of public administration literature. Therefore, while the results of this study do not attempt to verify, confirm or test any existing theory it is anticipated that they will contribute to research about appropriate leadership within the public sector as well as within public education settings.

3.3 Research Questions

The overarching research questions include the following:

- i. What is the nature of appropriate leadership and management practices as conceptualized by school district leaders operating within collaborative organizational arrangements?*
- ii. How can relevant leadership theories and/or models found in the public administration literature be applied to these forms of arrangements in order to provide a framework to help guide further scholarly enquiry?*

The following underlying questions establish a basis for answering the first overarching research question:

- a) Does your school district partner or 'outsource' with outside providers for services, professional development etc.*
- b) As a district leader of a program or department, how do you decide if you are going to bring in from outside of the district a non-system actor to help assist in the work of the department or district?*
- c) In what ways are partnerships with non-system actors helpful or beneficial to the work of a department or the district as a whole?*

- d) *What is given up or lost when the school district outsources?*
- e) *What are the most important aspects of managing the delivery of service once an arrangement or partnership has been entered into?*
- f) *How do you ensure that the work of a non-system actor is accommodated and aligned with district routines, practices and expectations?*
- g) *How do ensure that the district (and you as a leader), still remains in a position of authority and that goals, programs and initiatives remain aligned, monitored and are accountable?*
- h) *What are the important elements necessary to be in place from a district leader perspective if consideration is being given to engaging in an arrangement with a non-system actor?*

The secondary research question will be explored based upon the data and in consideration of the literature regarding possible theories and models of leadership used to analyze collaborative arrangements.

3.4 Research Design

In order to answer the research questions, I conducted a qualitative study that collected rich data from district-level administrators serving in two school districts in the state of Massachusetts. This qualitative data emerged from interviews that were carried out with these leaders and helped form two sets of data which are further referred to in the following chapters as District “A” and District “B.” Table 3.1 provides an overview of the individuals interviewed in both districts:

Table 3.1 Research Interviewees

<i>School District Central Office</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Identification Code</i>
‘A’	Superintendent	S1
	Director of Instructional Services	DIS1
	Director of Special Education	DSE1
	School Business Administrator	SBA1
‘B’	Superintendent	S2
	Director of Technology	DT
	Director of Special Education	DSE2
	Director of Maintenance & Operations	DM

3.4.1 The Nature of Qualitative Research and Suitability for the Present Study

Throughout the research community there have been numerous claims that attempt to justify qualitative research as a form of scholarly enquiry, particularly when dealing with aspects of the human condition. Sarantakos (1998) and Gay (1996) suggest that because reality is socially constructed and subjective, any research benefits greatly from having an approach that is interpretive and that captures reality as experienced by those directly involved in their naturalized setting. Such aspects of subjectivity and interpretation align with the adoption of a constructivist paradigm of interpreting the world which is predicated upon the notion of a socially constructed sense of reality (Searle, 1995).

Gay et al (2006) has emphasized the fact that qualitative research provides the advantage over quantitative research with the opportunity to investigate the variables being studied in their natural environment *where* and *as* they occur, and increases the ability to capture reality in a manner in which it is both experienced and witnessed by those being studied. In a similar sense, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) argue that qualitative research benefits from the naturalized setting as the source for data research with the researcher being the key instrument employing a qualitative research methodology. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) have also identified five elements of the qualitative research approach that provide a context for its fit for a particular piece of research. The elements of qualitative research include:

- i) A focus on the natural setting as the source of data collection with the researcher being the key instrument that works within the context of the institution.
- ii) Data that is descriptive and that centers on words and field notes.
- iii) A concern about processes rather than simply with outcomes or products.
- iv) An analysis of data inductively while building to abstractions as the information obtained is grouped together.
- v) Making meaning out of the information collected - with researchers operating in this field interested in how people make sense out of their surroundings.

In order to develop a conceptualization of appropriate and necessary leadership and management practices, it was necessary to gather the views of district leaders as nested within the context of their own understanding of school district leadership. By extension, probing these understandings also included aspects related to individual leader's "world views," assumptions and perceived realities of these matters that pertain to leading a school district in this context and under these conditions. Consequently, given that matters related to opinions and perceptions involve subjectivity, interpretation, and an individualized sense of reality, the selection of a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate and aligns with the nature of the research questions associated with the present study.

The suitability of qualitative research is broadly adaptable as a means to gather data as it is considered against the current study's backdrop. Specifically, it seems reasonable to characterize the environment within which a school district leader functions as complex and one which represents a context where the interpretation of what school leaders view as is important is, in effect, possible.

A qualitative research methodology also afforded me, as the researcher, the opportunity to gather a deeper sense of the views of management and leadership within this type of setting. The ability was facilitated by way of being able to gain a more in-depth and detailed understanding of this topic through the process of gathering rich data inclusive of words, transcripts and, by way of inductive analysis, central office /district leadership perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). This is vital given that I am seeking to capture people's feelings, beliefs, attitudes, perceptions and values of those studied.

Perhaps most importantly within the context of the current study, qualitative research deliberately searches for and takes into account participant perspectives. In addition, the path of building abstraction from the grouping and gathering of information helps develop theory (Bogdan & Biklen; 1992). In light of the fact that there is little understanding regarding this particular aspect of school district leadership, both of these emerge as key considerations.

3.4.2 The Data: Semi-Structured Interviews

Beyond the orientation of the qualitative research paradigm, the selection of the method itself is also an important consideration. As I am seeking to capture and better understand the perspectives of school district leaders, it is important to try and situate these views within their naturalized settings and within the backdrop of the actual views and understanding of school district operations regarding educational leadership and management within this specific context. In order to understand the perceptions of district leaders regarding appropriate leadership of both the school system itself and non-system actors, I would need to ensure that I could try and capture these perceptions through the collection of 'rich data' grounded in description and coupled with the views and experiences of those individuals I am seeking to collect data from.

This study employs semi-structured interviews as the methodology used to collect data methodology as it seemed to be the most suitable approach to gather an in-depth understanding of the perceived realities that the school district administrator encounters within the setting of serving in the role of district leader. The use of semi-structured interviews is an effective way to gather a collection of data for a qualitative study. These types of interviews are usually scheduled in advance, organized around a set of open-ended questions and can include an individual or group (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

In-depth interviews, such as the semi-structured interview, are a primary method of data collection employed in qualitative research and involve more intensive individual interviews with a small number of interviewees to explore perspectives and views around a particular topic (Boyce & Neale, 2006; Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003). In-depth interviews can also be used for such purposes as discovering a needs assessment or identifying issues and allow for the development of future questions and investigations into the subject (Guion, Diehl & McDonald, 2011).

The in-depth interview has been referred to as a form of *conversation* and provides a means through human interaction in which to construct knowledge about the social world (Legard et al, 2003). The conversation that ultimately unfolds through the interview is not simply a forum where research becomes the ‘pipeline’ and knowledge is transmitted, but where knowledge is constructed through the interview process (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997).

In terms of the applicability of the interview as a tool for research within the present study, the use of the interview is aligned with the purpose of the study in gathering rich data. In turn, this data was used to assist the researcher in exploring in detail the perspectives of school district leaders regarding leadership within the context of collaborations established through arrangements between the district and non-system actors.

All of the interviews were digitally recorded on the same device and aligned with the understanding that the recording of interviews is a useful practice in research to facilitate the capture of in-depth answers (Dunne, 1995). There were indeed many direct benefits of this device which included providing the ability to consistently play back the interviews in their entirety and facilitated the grouping of concepts, checking for accuracy, capturing words and phrases exactly as part of efforts to include an actual quote.

In conducting the actual interviews Dunne (1995)’s suggestions were kept in the forefront in terms of executing successful interviews:

- Interviews were conducted at the place of business of the participant in their office.
- Initial invitations for the interviews were sent out via email and then confirmed either by phone or by email with a confirmed and mutually agreed to date and time.

- The same procedures were followed in all interviews that included a brief introduction, and a review of the topic which the interview would cover.
- At the conclusion of the questions the interview participants were provided with the opportunity to add any additional comments or questions.
- The interviews were then reviewed and transcribed systematically in an effort to capture the qualitative data.
- Every effort was made to create a warm and friendly relationship with the participation throughout the interview itself.
- Participants were informed of the fact that the interviews and their involvement would be kept entirely confidential

3.4.3 Rationale for Interviews

According to Anderson (1990) interviews serve as a rich source of data collection and include many advantages including the fact that people are more engaged than in the task of completing a survey, and it allows to probe and clarify opinions allowing for more complete forms of the representation of ideas. An additional advantage to interviewing as a form of research is the fact that the opportunity to meet face-to-face provides a chance to better observe body language and context clues. Furthermore, the use of the interview within the present study held the added benefit of providing the best chance to relax the candidate and make them socially comfortable and less on guard or defensive. Not only did I travel to the interviewees' place of employment but I also live and work in the geographical area while holding a similar role as a district leader myself. Given that trust is important within the interview setting (Anderson, 1990) it is believed that such would be enhanced given the comfort of knowing that those interviewees held similar roles as that of the interviewer. Within this context, openness and empathy would be maximized.

Although the leaders were asked the same questions during the interviews, there were significant variations in the responses that came from those interviewed. Each interviewee expressed what they saw as significant from their perspective and experience

regarding the research questions and these ideas were culled together from a review of the data to help formulate the findings.

Because of the fact that all of the participants held central office positions, the same question set was used for all interviews. An effort was made to construct questions that were open-ended and not of the type that only elicited ‘yes’ or ‘no’ responses. All questions were designed to try and enhance the probability that participants would provide detailed descriptions, explanations and views to enhance the responses. Finally, where perhaps the interviewer felt like further clarity was needed, I encouraged the participants to further explain their answers or expand the detail that they provided.

3.4.4 The Sample: Selection and Determining the Sources for Interviews

There are approximately 350 public school districts throughout the state of Massachusetts. As a result, it would be impossible to conduct in-depth interviews with leaders in multiple districts based upon physical limitations and challenges such as time, geography and access. The basis upon which interviews within the study were selected centered around access to two school districts. These districts were selected through consideration of a number of factors which included the ability to gain access, physical geography, and time needed to carry out the research.

One district (District B) was the district in which I work as a central office administrator and the second district (District A) was the district where I reside. These districts represented somewhat ‘typical’ public school districts with similar administrative structures and senior-level/district administrative positions represented in the two districts. Both were locally controlled districts with locally elected school committees who served as governing boards and who relied upon a senior or executive level administrative team to carry out the administration of the district. More importantly, the problematic nature of access was eliminated, and concerns regarding confidentiality and/or disclosure of commercially sensitive information (as it related to any existing partnerships or existing non-system actor arrangements) was reduced. As a result of these

districts being selected, access to the district leadership teams was greatly enhanced by these realities and I was invited to ‘come in.’

In-depth semi-structured interviews were planned and conducted with interviewees in both District A and B. Due to the nature of the research centering around the collection of data from district leaders in two districts I utilized the districts as the unit of analysis for the study which included members of the central office leadership teams respectively. Consequently, I am focusing on these central office leaders as two groups of individuals that together form a “system” at the senior management level of the district.

3.5 Framework for Analysis

The data collected within the present study was analyzed using the following stages of analysis:

- The recordings from interviews were listened to and transcribed on a word processor.
- A list of terms, phrases descriptions were created and organized.
- Recordings were replayed again with an effort to identify additional terms, phrases or themes while crosschecking those that were originally created.
- The recordings were listed to again with significant or noteworthy quotes recorded.
- Emerging themes were then labeled and identified.

Given that this was an inductive study, there were no predetermined phrases, words, or categories to explore. In order to organize the data I sorted through the categories and attempted to map related concepts, behaviors, strategies and explanations. From this work and analysis I then identified any themes, sub-themes or key phrases or words emerging from the data analysis. Throughout the review, organization and classification of the data, every effort was made to ensure that the findings were not in any way distorted, altered or misrepresented. The data was then further reviewed “across cases” in the two districts

and similarities or comparisons, with any such references to the similarly themes implicitly or explicitly implied. The specific selection of quotations or extracts of concepts was based upon the research study's main aim, which centered on leading and managing within arrangements that involve non-system actors.

The method of analysis outlined above provided for an analysis of the significant aspects that were identified by the respondents as important regarding effective leadership and management within arrangements that included non-system actors. Through this method the data was continuously checked for accuracy and it better allowed me to identify the perceptions of district leaders regarding the factors and concepts associated with effective leadership and management within these contexts.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

I recognize that within the context of the current study, and given that I was seeking qualitative data regarding the views and perspectives of participants, I needed to depend upon the accuracy of the responses of those involved. To this end, a gathering of these perceptions will be based upon the reliability and honesty of the answers. In order to enhance the probability of obtaining reliable, honest and trustworthy answers, I took many things into consideration.

From the very beginning of the study, participants in each district were contacted by email and informed of my work along with the intended purpose of my study. In my initial written email correspondence with the participants I made them aware of the fact that I was interested in recording the interviews. Prior to the actual start of the interview I reiterated this intent and asked if there was any objection. All participants provided their direct permission and consent to record their interviews prior to the beginning of the interview. At the beginning of the interviews, I began recording prior to conducting the interview as a means to try and make the participant both comfortable and at ease about the recording process itself. In all interviews participants freely engaged in the conversation and identified their beliefs freely as they expressed their views and opinions regarding effectively fulfilling their role as a district administrator while reflecting on,

and providing, their perceptions regarding leading and managing non-system actors. The interviews themselves were not pressured, and all time, or the provision of follow-up clarity to a particular questions if not understood, was provided.

Their voluntary participation was sought and obtained with the confidentiality of the participants and the reported results were emphasized at all stages of the research in both districts. Participants were assured that upon the conclusion of the research, all findings would be reported only in an anonymous form and no individuals would be identified by name.

The Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2011), published by the *British Educational Research Association* (BERA), were followed, and all relevant sections were adhered to throughout this study.

3.7 Summary

This qualitative study employs in-depth interviews with school district leaders serving at the senior administrative level of two public school districts in the state of Massachusetts. These two districts were largely selected based upon their ease of access as well as the fact that they represented somewhat ‘typical’ public school districts in the state. The leaders were selected and sampled due to the belief that their responses would provide rich information with respect to the focus of the study. The data collected was arranged into two sets of data based upon the leaders situated within the two districts. The following chapter will provide an analysis of the results of the interview data collected through the interviews.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

In the following chapter I will present and discuss the data collected through the interviews. The findings are presented in three sections: i) the responses from interview data obtained from interviews with district leaders in district “A”; ii) the interview data collected with district leaders in district “B” and; iii) a comparison of the data obtained from leaders in both districts.

4.2 Emergent Themes from the Interviews

The following section provides a summary of the key findings that emerged from the interview data. Included within the narrative below are extracts obtained from the interviews which are utilized in an attempt to emphasize the perceptions and experiences of school district leaders as it relates to the research enquiry.

Based upon the analysis of the data, I structured the summary of the findings into the following three themes:

Theme 1: A rationale undergirding non-system actor engagement with the district

Theme 2: The impact of non-system actor engagement with the school district from a leadership perspective

Theme 3: Factors influencing appropriate leadership and management practices in arrangements with non-system actors

These overarching themes will be further analyzed through an examination of relevant sub-themes in order to help facilitate a more thorough understanding of the findings. A review of these sub-themes follows in the section below. The findings will be organized into two separate cases (District A and B) with data aligned to the leaders within these districts that participated in the study.

4.3. District A

District A is a public school district located in a suburb west of Boston, Massachusetts. It provides educational services for approximately 6000 students K-12, employs approximately 1100 full and part time employees and has an operating budget of 52 million dollars. The central office structure of the district includes the following six (6) positions: Superintendent; Assistant Superintendent; Director of Instructional Services; Director of Special Education; School Business Administrator and Human Resource Director. All but the Assistant Superintendent were interviewed in the present study.

The strengths of the district were noted to include an organization which focuses on kids and their best interests. As an example, the Director of Instructional Services (D1S1) stated:

D1S1: "Our district possesses a solid understanding of teaching and learning while being progressive. At the same time, we are always looking for ways to be progressive and do things for less that are already underway."

Additional strengths included the district's professional culture amongst the faculty and staff and the community's active support of the programs and activities offered for students. The superintendent referenced the presence of exceptional building-based leadership throughout the district that supports an organizational culture that is predicated upon decisions that are in the best interests of students.

According to some of the leaders interviewed, noted weaknesses included community support that sometimes wanes and a funding base that is low in comparison to other surrounding communities. Leaders alluded to focusing a lot of resources on only a small percentage of the students within the district and the ongoing mode of cuts and budgetary reductions that have plagued the district over time. For example, the School Business Administrator (SBAI) stated:

SBA1: "We are a district that has had to cut back on programming because of the strain on fiscal resources. Specifically, the non-tested areas and programs are going away."

In describing the level of achievement the superintendent described the district as one that performs well academically and is ‘high achieving.’ This was echoed by others who suggested that the district is high performing for what they have in terms of resources and that as an organization they do a great job educating kids given the resources that they do have available.

Obstacles of improvement noted include reference to the fact that the community has not always chosen to fully fund operations and that, at least according to the Director of Finance, the district could well be getting to the point where performance might be negatively impacted in the absence of resources. Within this context, at least three of those interviewed cited that adequate funding from the town as a significant concern going forward. Consequently, efforts have had to begin to focus on becoming more entrepreneurial and creative in the use of available funds, including a focus on pursuing grants and alternative funding streams.

4.3.1 Theme 1: A Rationale Undergirding Non-System Actor Engagement

As a general strategy, district leaders referenced their routine engagement in formal collaborative arrangements with non-system actors as a means to assist in carrying out the routine work of the district. Examples that were pointed to include a range of professional development providers, food service management and student transportation. System leaders were asked about the rationale undergirding the pursuit of these arrangements. What emerged were two respective sub-themes that included responding to limitations around funding and personnel and efforts to enhance the capacity of a department or program. Each of these sub-themes will be reviewed briefly in the section below.

Limitations Around Funding and Personnel

Despite the fact that the district maintains an operating budget of approximately \$54 million, leaders interviewed within the district cited this level of funding as limiting in the ability to provide a budget that is fully able to support the district's needs and demands. In fact, the superintendent estimated the budgetary needs to be much higher in order to adequately fund the operations of the system.

S1: "The district budget consisted of approximately 54 million dollars but needs to be about 90 million. Although there have not been cuts the last three years there needed to be more entrepreneurial and creative approaches taken."

In addition, there was a sense by the superintendent that while more needed to be done in terms of growing and expanding programs and services, it could not come as an additional cost added to the base operating budget. Consequently, in the face of shrinking and or extremely strained budgets, the administration recognized their need to focus on striving to expand programs where possible, but only in a manner that was cost-neutral. In reference to this notion, the superintendent stated that *"...an emerging motto has been if there is a new initiative it needs to be budget neutral."*

Other district leaders held similar but slightly different perspectives. For example, while some acknowledged that the district may have had plenty of resources in the way of supplies, equipment and materials, many felt that the total budgetary supported personnel (i.e. actual staff employed by the district) was lacking and insufficient to meet the total needs of their department. Leaders interviewed referred to the belief that there was an inadequate 'layer' of people employed by the district necessary to provide all of the needs to meet student, teaching and program demands. According to the School Business Administrator:

SBA1: "We are a high performing district for what we have in terms of resources. We do a fabulous job with our students. However, the strain on our resources has led to us outsourcing and we have had to cut back on programming because of the strain of resources. The community has not always chosen to fund operations but the district is getting to a point where I can see the performance dropping because we don't have the resources."

From the perspective of these district leaders, District A represents a school system that is underfunded and under-resourced. Consequently, in deciding on fiscal efficiencies, district leaders have made the decision to explore and pursue outside providers who may be able to provide the service in a more cost effective manner.

Enhancement of Capacity

In response to operating within this financially constrained environment leaders acknowledged that they have increasingly turned to outside collaborations in an effort to seek assistance to enhance district capacity. For example, the superintendent reported that the scope of engaging non-system actors often revolves around a deliberate and calibrated decision to bring in outside expertise to assist faculty in their work. Specifically, this applied to either efforts of trying to expand their organizational knowledge through professional development or in relationship to providing a specialized service:

S1: “We partner a lot (with outside agencies) for professional development but this also extends to literacy consultants and counseling related to special education services.”

The Director of Instructional Services (DISI) reported that past arrangements involving formal collaborations (or ‘outsourcing’ as she referred to these arrangements) has spanned a wide range of services from bringing in an outside provider for instructional-related needs to professional development and assisting in the delivery of curriculum and assessment functions. She described this work as a “partnership” as a means to collaborate for a short period of time to provide what is necessary, and then to move beyond the arrangement. As stated:

DISI: “We partner or outsource extensively. We’re using consultancy extensively directly for P.D., curriculum, and assessment development and we provide PD from an outside provider for the entire administrative team.”

These forms of arrangements also include non-instructional services throughout the district as well. For example, the School Business Administrator identified the fact that

the district has pursued assistance through outsourcing for food service management and the provision of transportation services (the latter will be further referred to below).

The Director of Instructional Services (DISI) outlined the fact that in order to establish greater capacity in certain areas, even in the areas of instructional related services, seeking partnerships with organizational firms or with individuals outside the district was a necessary step towards shoring up areas in the operation of the district that were perceived to be lacking:

DISI: “We don’t have the layers of people to support and provide for this work. So, without curriculum coordinators, and staff as a whole, we are stretched thin and don’t have the internal capacity for curriculum alignment.”

Thus, a rationale for this partnership centered on curriculum and instruction with work closer to the “technical core” of schooling. However, the rationale for doing so seems predicated on the fact that there were insufficient resources to hire and retain full-time staff to provide these services. In other words, what was lacking was the actual capacity to fulfill organizational needs.

A deeper example of an arrangement between the district and a non-system actor that further underscored the efforts to try and expand district capacity while working with limited financial resources was the business administrator’s insight into a formal agreement between the district and a food services management company. School districts are obligated to provide a food program for students who utilize the cafeteria services. There was a centralized belief that, due to the transformation (s) necessary as a result of extensive legislative changes in the nutritional standards at the state level, the previous district management (an employee of the district) lacked the knowledge, expertise and capacity to guide the transition of the department towards meeting the new guidelines. Consequently, the decision was made to bring in an outside provider to provide the leadership as it was felt that “....the purchasing power, knowledge and capability provided, was believed, a better direction to go.” (District A, School Business Administrator).

Both the superintendent as well as the Business Administrator reported that the use of an outsourced management company to oversee the food services department was, from their perspective, effective in realizing the goals and ambitions anticipated for this arrangement. They felt that the partnership had been successful to the point that they had intended to continue with the formal arrangement for the foreseeable future.

In summary, based upon the interviews it was evident that often district leaders in District A decided to pursue a strategy that established formalized arrangements with non-system actors as a means to support the district's work and delivery of services to help in offsetting perceived 'organizational' limitations. Given that a significant part of the role and expectations for the district leader is to oversee their respective department and their functions, district leaders in District A describe a context that includes arrangements with non-system actors as an operational strategy intended to support the provision of both instructional and non-instructional related services. There were two specific findings which emerged as related sub-themes and seemed to undergird the decision to collaborate with a non-system actor. The first suggested that leaders felt like the pursuit of such arrangements helped respond to funding limitations either in the form of resources and/or personnel. The second sub-theme pointed to the fact that leaders at times decided to pursue collaborative arrangements as a means to enhance the capacity of the district to compensate for perceived organizational limitations.

4.3.2 Theme 2: The Impact of Non-System Actor Engagement with the School District From a Leadership Perspective

In pointing to collaborative arrangements that aid delivery of school system needs, district leaders also suggested that these approaches hold the potential of impacting their work as leaders overseeing their department, staff and the system as a whole. Based upon the interviews, there were noted implications that emerged as sub-themes as a result of these arrangements on two broader areas of their work and practice as leaders within the system. The first sub-theme includes their role and responsibility of managing, controlling and holding accountable the non-system actor and the second sub-theme

relates to the impact of non-system actor on the “system actors.” Each of these will be reviewed in the section that follows.

Control and Accountability of the Non-System Actor

When a district enters into agreement with an actor from outside the walls of the system some of the leaders in District A cited challenges to their own management responsibility as it related to effectively overseeing aspects of the operations or services which the outside actor provided.

One key example that surfaced by two of the leaders was District A’s formalized agreement with an outside provider to deliver special education instructional services to students within the district. There was a perception that the expertise and resources within the ranks of the district’s Special Education department were insufficient to provide the appropriate services for a particular program that was required to serve children with intensive needs. Consequently, the district established an agreement with an outside provider to operate a program within the district so that the students could remain educated in-district.

However, the superintendent, as well as the Director of Student Services, identified this arrangement as one that was accompanied by ongoing challenges and problems that were associated with the ability of the district administration to appropriately control, direct and monitor the provider. Citing two examples, concerns were raised regarding how the non-system actor conducted and carried out team meetings and how the data on the students that they were serving was shared with the other staff in the district. Both were ‘areas of practice’ that the Director of Instructional Services suggested simply did not align with the policies and procedures of the district. This necessitated the senior administration at both the district and building level to enhance their involvement through a very methodical intervention to re-align the procedures. In response, it was recognized that more pronounced focus on the lines of accountability was actually necessary. As an example, the Director of Special Education stated:

DSE1: *“While I recognize that I couldn’t drive the train by myself (referencing the decision to partner to support services), I realized that what was necessary was that we needed more deliberations and a more refined decision making matrix as to who would be making which decisions.”*

Referencing this same example, the superintendent acknowledged issues with the control the system had over the outside special education provider:

S1: *“[it felt like] accountability is lost with the (ABC) partnership as they (the provider) seemingly did not feel that they were accountable to the principal or to the special education administrator.”*

And although the term ‘accountability’ was used, the reference seemed to matter in terms of control equally as it related to aligning the actions of the actor to what was expected in the district and directing these resources in a manner that is consistent with the designated needs of the system.

Additional insight was provided by the School Business Administrator (SBA1) who outwardly acknowledged that while the benefits of engaging in a collaborative arrangement can be realized, at times there is a question as to the utility of collaborating with outside providers. While she recognized that in the current financial climate outsourcing as a means of aiding service delivery is often necessary (and sometimes the only choice), she also noted that there are issues that impact the work she is performing. As she stated:

SBA1: *“While I have no regrets regarding my decision to partner with our outside provider for food service management, I am not convinced that this outsourcing is the best thing as a long term solution. There have been bumps in the road related to communication and, at times, decision-making.”*

A final example that demonstrates the challenges that can be associated with issues of control was evident through the discussion that the superintendent had regarding the district’s partnership that they had with an outside provider of special education services. In reference to this arrangement, which was designed to provide counseling services for some of the more needy and fragile students of the district, the administration found first hand how navigating the working relationship (s) with outside providers can at times be

difficult as it relates to overstepping the role and function in which the arrangement was originally intended. As was shared:

S1: “...they had been doing counseling and they found that they morphed into the role of becoming more advocates than serving in their role by-design of counselors. As a result, the administration needed to wean them off of the caseloads, adapt, and put into place their own counselors. “

Navigating the Impact of Non-System Actors on System Actors

School district leaders also provided insight into the impact of engaging non-system actors in the function of the district and their challenges in maintaining accountability of the actions and activity of the non-system actor. This theme included reference to issues with cultural adaptation.

An example that provided a glimpse into some of the challenges associated with non-system actors adapting to the existing organizational culture revolved around the outsourcing of the management of the food services department, as previously mentioned in this study.

When the Business Administrator in District A believed that their own management was insufficient and lacked the full capacity to realign the food services program to comply with a new set of regulations released by the state, the decision was made to enter into a collaborative agreement with an outside provider to enhance the capacity as a means to ensure that there was compliance. In reflecting upon the collaboration (which remained in place at the time of these interviews), the School Business Administrator reported that the external partner who provided the management *did* provide the capacity for the district to conform to the regulations and achieve the transition for the department that was necessary. However, issues arose in relation to the overall accountability and interactions of this actor within the district. Specifically, considerable challenges and conflict between the district’s school nurses and the food services management provider emerged. There were numerous student situations where greater care and oversight was required to ensure the safety of some of the district’s more ‘fragile’ students who possessed special dietary

needs. In the past, under the previous food service management arrangement that included district employees, these issues were dealt with in a comprehensive, sensitive and appropriate way specific to the organizational culture's expectations. However, when the new company began their work and took over the control of the operations of this department, there emerged widespread challenges that were inserted into the day-to-day operations. As a primary example, it was when the nutritional needs of the students were identified and passed along from the nurses to the food services company, the non-system actor did not pass along the information which repeatedly led to extensive issues the individual school nurses dealt with for weeks. The fallout of this error was significant with students, staff and parents adopting the position that this outside food management company (non-system actor) was not accountable.

The district leadership identified the fact that what was required to navigate these challenges was a deliberate effort, through their own additional time and attention, in trying to resolve the situation. Not only did the unfolding challenges within this arrangement create a situation where additional tensions amongst the district staff surfaced within which the district leadership needed to resolve, but it also created a challenging perception of the partnership with the food service company amongst other employees in the district and within the community itself. While it was felt that bringing in a non-system actor achieved the overarching goal of enhancing their capacity in support of the transition to the new regulations, it was also clear that this partnership impacted significantly the role of district leadership. In particular, the fact that there was an incredible amount more time needed on the School Business Administrator's part to effectively *manage* the department and to hold the actor accountable was identified as additional challenges to her overall management of the department. Ultimately, bringing in this non-system actor in the form of the food services management company actually brought about an additional level of leadership responsibility and necessary management to ensure accountability. As the School Business Administrator (SBAI) shared:

SBAI: "Based on this one experience, I am probably spending more time with this company (referring to the company of food services) than I have with some of our other outsourced providers for whom I have held responsibility. I recognize that there is more

wrapped up because of the changes in the guidelines but it still has required greater time and attention.”

Through such accounts, district leaders identified the fact that they believed that there are benefits to the presence of non-system actors within a school district. At the same time non-system actors also holds the potential to bring along additional challenges, tensions and obstacles for the operation of the district. These might more appropriately be deemed *costs* that are associated with these arrangements in terms of the increased responsibility or demands created for the leader overseeing these arrangements with the district. Sometimes, as was revealed, this hinges around the non-system actor fitting into the culture and meeting the internal expectations that are expected of them in terms of the work and how it should be carried out inside the school system.

In summary, based upon the perceptions and experiences of many of the leaders interviewed in District A, collaborative arrangements between school districts and non-system actors can bring about desired benefits for the district, department or program for which the arrangement was pursued. At the same time, the potential to adversely impact the work of the district leader as a result of such arrangements that engage an actor from outside of the system is real and exists. Specifically, based upon some of the accounts of leaders within District A there were issues with adapting to the culture of the organization and meeting internal expectations of the organization. While these district leaders did not suggest that these arrangements created insurmountable challenges, strategic efforts to try and ensure that the entry of the non-system actor was as seamless and beneficial as possible to their work and that of the organization emerged as a key area of inquiry alongside consideration of effective management and leadership issues. This, in turn, leads to the third theme which focuses on the various factors that influence appropriate leadership and management within these forms of arrangements.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Factors that Influence Appropriate Leadership and Management within Non-System Actor Arrangements

The effort to capture the perspectives of these leaders regarding what they conceptualize as *appropriate and necessary* leadership and management practices emerges as an important consideration within the context of seeking to understand conditions that contribute to the success of these arrangements. Upon review of the interview data, there emerged three (3) broad sub-themes from the perspective of District A leaders that established a basis for understanding the factors constituting appropriate practices of managing and leading within these contexts from their perspective. These three themes include:

- i) Preparation for entering into an arrangement with non-system actors
- ii) Establishing the context of the organization
- iii) Overseeing Organizational Activity

Each of these themes will be addressed within the section below.

Preparation for Entering into an Arrangement with Non-System Actors

Once the decision is made to formalize arrangements establishing a contract with a non-system actor, district leaders referenced the importance of *preparing* the district and its employees for the arrival and entry of the actor. Central to this transition of entry involves concepts of organizational legitimacy as it relates to the non-system actor's role, how the non-system actor is received by the other employees, and how this interactivity aligns with the existing organization's culture.

Establishing the legitimacy between the non-system actor and the organization itself was identified as an important part of the district's readiness to enter into an arrangement with someone coming in from outside of the school system. System leaders referenced the importance of ensuring that the individual, team or service provider from outside of the system was not seen as an isolated entity or 'arm' of what might be considered a service

provider 'grid.' In other words, they needed to be seen as more than simply some agency or provider from some external organization that was just carrying out what might have been their routine work inside the walls of the district.

S1: "I think it is tied to leadership as successful implementation has to look at culture as a facet of any decision-making. We are in such a human profession; it is not like we are making widgets. It has that culture and human fact to it at the core of the decision to privatize to serve the interests of students."

The leaders interviewed acknowledged that there are two vital aspects to this early stage of transition into the district. First, as leaders they had to make the decision to pursue an arrangement with a non-system actor and formalize their involvement in the system. But second, they also had to ensure that there was a concerted effort at presenting information for faculty and staff so that they could have a clear sense as to the rationale for bringing into the district an outside provider. In essence, these leaders were acknowledging that just because the senior administration came to terms with the belief that the school system needed to expand its capacity and bring in resources from the outside, it could not simply be assumed that this same level of understanding and perspective was shared by other employees in the school system.

This perspective underscores the perceived importance of paying attention to the existing culture and staff of the organization. The presence of non-system actors who conduct work inside the system alongside system employees necessitates that there is attention paid to brokering these relationships; without such, these collaborations can be problematic. Structured, planned and deliberate opportunities to align relationships with those in and outside of the school system were reportedly deemed important as a necessary aspect of 'situating' the non-system actor within the organization's culture. According to the superintendent:

S1: "Meeting with people....we facilitated the introduction of the management team.... let them get comfortable and then structured follow-up meetings that served as further 'touch points' in the year that provided for checking in. In my opinion, this (these face-to-face meetings) helped create trust, communication and leadership that is accessible to people and is visible."

In reflecting upon past arrangements that ended up working out most effectively, the superintendent reported that she found that convening meetings with the district employees and administrative team members along with the members of the non-system actor were often critical efforts in helping forge relationships between district staff and these actors from outside of the school system. This provided a much-needed opportunity of focusing on the “humanistic” and personnel relationships that were also stressed by the School Business Administrator as important in enhancing the overall opportunities for success within the organization:

SBA1: “The district administrator needs to develop these relationships with providers who are coming in from outside. Employees [of the district] are nervous and we need to support the employee groups and the district employees have to develop that trust by watching and observing how the district interacts with the third party vendor.”

Thus, the importance of building and providing for these interactions emerged as a facet of management-activity that was believed to be important. The attention paid to supporting the integration between system actors and non-system actors elevates the chance of success emerges in the aforementioned comments by both the superintendent and the School Business Administrator. It is also further evident in the comments by the Director of Instructional Services when acknowledging that, while skill sets in terms of leadership and management are indeed similar between overseeing both system and non-system actors, the importance of allocating time and attention to building and brokering these collaborative ‘relationships’ between system and non-system actors becomes clear:

SBA1: “I think that the same skill sets can be applied – whether an in house employee or outside provider. I think the issues with an outside provider has to focus more on the relationship building. While the skill set can be the same [leading system and non-system actors] it gets applied differently for an outside provider and involves more of the relationship building skill.”

Based upon these perceptions and experiences, insufficient attention to the relationships and organizational culture can adversely impact the organizational *legitimacy* for the non-system actor. In turn, this holds the potential to undermine their role, and thus the possible success, of the arrangement with the district.

Establishing the Context of the Organization

In addition to the stage of initiation and entry there was also the identification of the importance of the role that the district leader should play in establishing the *context* of the organization within which the non-system actor is going to function. District leaders pointed to the fact that the actor from the outside must have a clear, ‘un-obstructed’ view into what the district stands for by way of its values, organizational goals and system-wide expectations. Many of those interviewed pointed to the fact that they must hold responsibility to ensure that such critical information is transmitted through structured, meaningful and deliberate ways. This critical information was inclusive of the need to establish and articulate the expectations for performance and clarity around what the district is looking for in terms of a product or service to be provided which is extended far beyond merely the established terms of a contract.

Many of the leaders in District A stressed the importance of taking steps throughout the process of the collaborative arrangement to ensure that the outside actor is clear about the organizational context within which they will function. These system leaders felt that any non-system actor should be fully aware of what defines the district, its culture and its expectations and, what the district is all about. As the superintendent stated, “...“*you need to let the vendor know who we are and that this is what drives us.*”

Establishing overarching expectations for the ‘work’ of non-system actors was also stressed throughout many of the interviews. Conceptually, this included not only establishing expectations for how particular aspects of their work for which they were responsible for was carried out and delivered, but also how they align their work and operations with those of the district.

The holistic engagement of these non-system actors simply can’t be left to chance and must be planned and attended to. Establishing the contractual agreement that formalizes the partnership is only the first step in a long process. If, as a district leader, it is expected that the individual or team from an outside partner is going to come into the district and

serve effectively, there has to be an overall focus from the leader's perspective on establishing this context that facilitates their engagement.

According to the superintendent in District A, establishing the expectations for the anticipated outcomes is extremely important.

SI: "As the person in charge of some of these partnerships, I have found that you have to have tight parameters as to what the expectations are for. Setting up a monthly meeting and keeping them (the work ...focus etc.) in alignment with districts and school improvement plans is important."

The School Business Administrator echoed this when acknowledging that, from her experiences, those arrangements that have led to greater effectiveness and overall results have required clarity around establishing guidelines and expectations for what is to be 'delivered.'

SBA1: "I think that you need to go in with clear guidelines and expectations on both sides as to what we are looking for and what the vendor has to provide for us."

The superintendent also acknowledged that the onus is on the administration to provide this formalized entry and provisioning. Furthermore, it is important that the non-system actor understands the values, goals and adheres to the vision which is not only equally applicable to the full-time faculty or staff member of the district but also important to the non-system actor who operates and carries out a role in the district. This notion was best articulated by the district's School Business Administrator who noted that:

SBA1: "I also think at the same time that they [the non-system actor] have to know where we are as a district to know what our core values are. The district needs to maintain its own integrity and core values and if it is going to engage with a partner [non-system actor] we need to ensure that there is a common goal and vision. If we are going to go that route on an instructional level the leadership has to embrace that and make the message clear to the teachers and district employees as a while that we coming together as a partner to show that joint level of support. Almost like a relationship with a union."

Summary

In summary, within the context of the data collected from these district-level leaders in District A, there are two fundamental aspects that emerged which, in the opinions of many of those interviewed, help establish a successful integration of a non-system actor into the system. These include establishing the trust and legitimacy of the non-system actor and developing a deep sense of the organizational context so that the non-system actor is working within a clear understanding of the goals, values, and expectations of the system as a whole. While it may well be that the presence of the non-system actor is temporary, the perceptions of the district leaders underscores the belief that these actors should essentially operate in an environment where they are considered *like* employees of the district. Consequently, leaders seem to believe that they hold a responsibility to align the work of a non-system actor against a backdrop of trust, acceptance and legitimacy while also aligning their work with the goals and expectations of the system.

The next section of this chapter explores the perceptions of the district leaders regarding effective administrative oversight of the work of non-system actors within the school district environment on a day-to-day basis.

Overseeing Organizational Activity

The importance of formalizing arrangements to structure the entry of the non-system actor into the organization also extends to critical aspects of monitoring and overseeing the organization after the partnership has been established. Putting in place a contract, and ‘officially’ bringing into the district the actor is but the first step in the process. Essentially, these leaders operating at the macro level of the organization acknowledged that it would be misguided to believe that the work of the district leader stops at that point after the non-system actor is actively engaged in the district and carrying out their work.

Broadening this area is the need for the district leader not just to be involved in setting the expectations for the partnership but also paying attention to developing a system of

accountability to support the arrangement. If there is going to be a solid, beneficial and productive relationship, it has to extend far beyond simply a contract that outlines expectations for the district. As the superintendent stated:

S1: *“You need to know what you are getting and what your expectations are, while being on top of them and maybe being more rigid about scheduling and making sure they are accountable to what they said that they are going to do.”*

The district leaders maintained the fact that the work of non-system actors should not be simply left unmonitored as there needs to be regular and timely oversight of these actors to ensure that expectations are being met and the goals for the arrangement realized. While it is understood that non-system actors are coming into districts with a manager or administrator already in place who is responsible for their work, the leader at the district level remains ultimately responsible for the outcome of the arrangement just as if the individual was a *system actor*. This idea was underscored by the comments of the Director of Instructional Services who referenced the fact that while it would be rational to assume that these types of arrangements might represent a situation where there could be a more “hands-off” approach this is not sufficient:

D1S1: *“I think for outside consultants, you need to retain control and that means that it is not really shared leadership. Even though it is shared input into mutual decision-making it is really ‘the buck stops here’ approach.”*

In other words, such an arrangement cannot rely alone on a central belief that the non-system actor will carry out their role according to what is expected by district leadership and/or as what might have been delineated within a contract arrangement.

As an example of the significance that providing this oversight must serve, there was an account provided of a literacy specialist who was brought into the district on contract as a consultant. While this specialist had in fact served “on contract” for a few years, the Director of Instructional Services outlined the fact that there had historically been little coordination and oversight of this provider’s service to the district:

DIS1: “... *the elementary literary specialist who was here for three or four years. What I observed was that these consultants essentially were free agents with very little supervision and very little input. And this reality really set the stage for their work.*”

What was discovered was that that the level of actual services that the consultant provided throughout the assigned schools varied tremendously. There was little oversight or structured accountability provided by any system or district leader and, as a result, the delivery of service by the consultant did not maximize the arrangement. Without the appropriate management as a backdrop to the consultant’s work the full scope of the work expected did not get done and the resources spent on the relationship were simply, in the opinion of the district leader, not maximized.

It was also noted by another administrator who suggested that the opportunity to exercise necessary control and oversight of outsider providers coming into the district was sometimes actually easier in comparison to overseeing employees of the system.

S1: “*You can sometimes be more bottom line with directives then you can with an inside group (of employees). You can be more top down and directive.*”

However, providing the necessary leadership and management requires continually assessing the work, reviewing the goals established as to what is to be delivered for the school system, and continually gauging the effectiveness of the service. As the Director of Instructional Services provided:

D1S1: “[Engaging] *the work of a non-system actor necessitates a constant management state of checking in with those consultants to assess the work as it is going on, continuing to look at the evaluations from teachers anecdotally and formally, readjusting and ultimately making the decision to re-hire them or not for the following year.*”

While the pursuit of an outside partner to temporarily fill a void can be merely temporary, perhaps the sentiments by the Director of Instructional Services capture it best:

D1S1: “*The frustration for me for outsourcing is that it is not sustainable. One of the management pieces is that when you hire outside consultants you have to really manage them.*”

This represents a rather critical aspect of arrangements between school districts and non-system actors. While bringing into the district an outside provider may realize the goals for pursuing such an arrangement the presence of a non-system actor can impact the managerial role of the district leader in adding to the demands of the role and their responsibility. The superintendent captured this idea when she suggested that the added element of that external actor to the system crosses lines from simply that of a *leadership* function to shift the focus to more of a *management* function.

S1: ‘When looking at outsourcing it is more of a management function then a leadership function. I think that there is a subtle difference when it touches instruction....there is a human resource aspect to it that is reflected in the degree to which HR resources are impacted.’

Within this aspect of adding additional functions to the role that cross the lines of not only leading but managing, the other important reality which emerges that falls on the shoulders of the leader has to do with overseeing this activity as it relates to the planning for the eventual end to the collaborative arrangement. Specifically, leading and managing also has to consider a succession plan of sorts.

DIS1: “to me, a really good consultant is planned obsolesce to build internal capacity. My belief is that we need to be building internal capacity for sustainability.”

4.3.4 District A Summary

The findings connected with the interview data from leaders in District A were arranged into three separate themes. These themes attempted to capture the views of those district leaders regarding various aspects pertaining to collaborative arrangements with non-system actors. Situated within these three themes was a broader collection of sub-themes. The first theme centered around the rationale for entering into non-system actor arrangements where it was found that funding limitations, including efforts to compensate for insufficient personnel and efforts to enhance the district capacity, were at the core of why these leaders pursued such collaborative arrangements.

The second theme explored the impact of non-system actors on the school district. Within these findings leaders at the district level noted the challenges at times with regards to control and accountability over the non-system actor as well as in navigating the impact of these actors on the district employees or “system-actors.”

The third theme centered around the factors that influenced appropriate leadership and management with non-system actor arrangements. There were three separate sub-themes which included system entry, organizational context and the overseeing of the organization. System entry focused in on the importance of establishing legitimacy and rationale along with brokering relationships with existing organizational culture and staff. The organizational context included findings that pointed to the importance of system leaders articulating values, organizational goals and establishing system-wide expectations. Finally, the theme addressing the oversight of the organization included system leaders pointing to the need to establish systems of accountability, continually assessing work and reviewing goals and planning for sustainability once the arrangement comes to an end.

4.4 District B

District B is located in a suburb just outside of Boston, Massachusetts. It provides public education for approximately 3500 students K-12. It employs approximately 500 full and part time employees and has in place an elected body of six (6) school committee members with an operating budget of 34 million dollars. The central office structure of the district includes the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent for Administration & Finance, Director of Technology, Director of Student Services, School Business Administrator and a Director of Maintenance & Operations.

The strengths of the district included one that is high achieving with consistently some of the highest student test scores on the state’s standardized assessment system. Noted weaknesses included at times focusing all of the resources exclusively on teaching and learning within the classroom and not other aspects of the operations. Other leaders

alluded to focusing a lot of resources on only a small percentage of the students and the ongoing mode of cuts and budgetary reductions that have plagued the district over time.

Some of the obstacles noted included the fact that the community has not always chosen to fund operations beyond the allocation provided to each of the departments within the town. The determined cost-of-living increase equivalent by which each department budget (i.e. fire, police and schools) is usually allocated each year is typically all that the school department receives. Consequently, the ramifications of this include the existence of an operating budget that usually realizes a minimal increase as opposed to establishing a budget that is more representative of system needs.

4.4.1 Theme 1: A Rationale Undergirding Non-System Actor Engagement

School leaders in District B reported that there is a history within their district of looking to outside providers to assist the district in the provision of services and expertise. These arrangements vary and include both instructional and non-instructional services including special education programming, support services and instruction, food service management and delivery, student transportation, professional development and custodial services. Based upon a review of the data there were found to be two broader sub-themes which undergirded the decision-making that supported non-system actor arrangements. The first centered on efforts of seeking innovation and expertise and the second was predicated upon the use of strategies to economize district resources. Each of these sub-themes will be briefly reviewed below.

Seeking Innovation and Expertise

Within District B leaders described the district as one that did not actually lack in terms of fiscal or human resources. In fact, all central office administrators interviewed reported that there were sufficient resources in both personnel as well as general operating budgets from their perspective. However, there was a sense that what was often ‘driving’ decisions to engage the assistance of non-system actors centered around efforts to seek

innovative ways to comply with challenges or mandates confronting the ‘system.’ Capturing this notion included the comments by the superintendent:

S2: “Schools are being asked to do more with less, and you have to look for creative and different ways to accommodate these compliance activities. If as a district we don’t have the capacity to provide the high quality service then we look to consider outsourcing. You also need to look at cost savings.”

Such sentiments were evident through the comments also offered by the Director of Special Education who commented:

DES2: “ New expectations and new regulations are being thrown at a district and often we don’t have anyone on the district [staff] who can take on these responsibilities so we have to outsource.”

The leadership sought out experts from outside the system due to the perception that the district or department may have lacked the knowledge or definitive expertise to execute the work or service provision deemed necessary. Leaders pointed out that strategic planning leading to engaging non-system actors was a way to ‘pay’ for services and fill the void or organizational deficits.

DES2: “The fundamental reason that you bring in an outside provider is to build that capacity and not for the provider to be there permanently. The opportunity for the skills based expertise factor is huge that an outside provider can bring to the game.”

Economizing Resources

The second factor that seemed to serve as a rationale for bringing in an outside actor to aid in system delivery revolved around seeking ways to economize fiscal resources. At times, leaders reported that they sought to economize their budgetary operations and they found themselves doing so through the decision to temporarily expand the district personnel/service providers through a limited contractual arrangement. These forms of agreements, which formalized the entry of non-system actors, was based upon a mode of thinking that included an actual savings in real dollars to the district. Staff expansion to meet needs was only temporary and, depending on the arrangement, did not include the associated costs such as pension contributions, health care and unemployment insurance

costs that would have otherwise been necessitated had the district hired full-time employees.

Perhaps capturing the essence associated with this need to economize resources the superintendent stated:

S2:” If the federal and state government continues what it perceives to be its grab for authority in the public school system, whether it be testing or teacher evaluation or ELL training, if that continues, I think you will see school systems that have to reach outside of their own walls as a means to financially provide the best way to economize fiscal resources. Schools are forced to do more with less and seeking out ways to economize becomes critical.”

In summary, the district leaders interviewed in District B provided insight into the fact that the district engages in a variety of collaborative arrangements within outside providers which include both instructional and non-instructional areas of the operation. There were two specific sub-themes which aligned with the rationale behind these decisions to pursue such strategies which included seeking out innovation and expertise along with efforts to economize resources.

4.4.2 Theme 2: The Impact of Non-System Actor Engagement with the School District from a Leadership Perspective

The data related to the impact of non-system actors on their efforts of leading and managing the district and respective departments pointed to two sub-themes: i) the alteration of the traditional service delivery model of the organization and; ii) the concept of the sustainability of services.

The Alteration of the Traditional Delivery Model

Leaders identified aspects related to the alteration of the more traditional model of in-house service delivery where the organization is able to conduct its routine business through the performance of employees hired, supervised and evaluated by management within the system. Some pointed to their belief that district programs and services carried

out by district staff are able to maintain a more complete “grasp” of the entire process inclusive of aspects that include planning, development implementation and direct evaluation. In essence, all aspects of the delivery ‘grid’ are readily overseen by the administration of the district. However, some cited the fact that when this design is altered, (such as is through the incorporation of non-system actors) the operation as a whole is altered and impacted:

DES2: *“The first thing that comes to mind is the personal relationships that take place from students and providers. When you have someone coming in from the outside who is not a member of the team. You lose that part when it is not the ‘complete’ model.”*

There was also the aspect of oversight that is compromised within the context of these arrangements and, sometimes, is only realized after the engagement has gotten underway. As the Director of Student Services noted in his interview:

DES1: *“I think I have not been vigilant enough of some of the recent outsourcing partnerships and, through the learning curve, I realize that my expectations for them have not been articulated clearly enough for them. There are other examples where I get a bill each month but don’t have the data to support their work. For example, an agency that provides specialized counseling services for students. I wonder if they have sent in their progress reports and or have the data.”*

Issues Related to Sustainability of Services

While there may be a clear rationale that supports entering into collaborative arrangements with non-system actors the data also pointed to the possibility for ‘disruption’ once the arrangement comes to an end. Formalizing an arrangement, and organizing the department and/or personnel around this expanded design, becomes a part of the operational norm. However, leaders pointed to the fact that if the district is not prepared to assume the role and responsibility of the non-system actor upon the termination of the agreement there is the potential to adversely impact the district.

One particular example cited by both the superintendent and the Director of Student Services related to challenges associated with an outside provider who established a long-term presence in the district for the delivery of a highly specialized program for autistic

children receiving special education services. The issue was associated with *sustainability* and the superintendent sighted the example of the partnership and was reflecting on the experience recently in the district.

S2: “There is a danger here that if you have the service and it is being successful, but then the district decides to pull away that service, it can be a very challenging situation. In our case, parents depend on this program, so there were intensified concerns regarding the thought of removing the program and delivering the service in-house.”

4.4.3 Theme 3: Factors that Influence Appropriate Leadership and Management within Non-System Actor Arrangements

The data from leaders in District B pertaining to the findings related to the factors influencing appropriate leadership and management was also assembled into three (3) sub-themes each containing a number of items that stakeholders identified either directly or indirectly. The three categories include:

- i) Preparation for entering into an arrangement with non-system actors
- ii) Establishing the context of the organization
- iii) Overseeing Organizational Activity

Each of these sub-themes will be reviewed in the section that follows.

Preparation for Entering into an Arrangement with Non-System Actors

The importance of managing the entire contractual agreement process emerged from the interviews with a variety of comments focusing on this important aspect of the organizational operations prior to the actual launch of the work. As the Director of Student Services noted:

DSE2: “It becomes key to consider how you formulate a contract. My contract ideally needs to include that I get to review all reports generated. There are other examples where I get a bill each month but don’t have the data to support their work. “

This activity, as it relates to managing and leading, was deemed important with aspects of ensuring that a formalized agreement is in place which works to the benefit of the district in order to allow district leadership to preserve the ‘district’ in a position of authority. It was pointed out that while there may have been a thoughtful, informed pathway towards deciding to move in the direction of bringing into the district a non-system actor, frequently insufficient thought, care or attention is paid to the managerial aspect of developing the contract. The Director of Technology (DT) also referred to the development and implementation of the contract as key element in providing a structure for this relationship:

DT: *“As a district leaders responsible for a department, if I am going to move forward and establish a company to come in and assist my department with our work I need to make sure that we have a contract in place with warranties along with written promises to provide support in some way.”*

Leaders spoke to the belief that they needed to pay very close attention to the ‘legitimacy-building’ and assurance that broad scale support has been established first before attempting to integrate into the district an outside actor.

DT: *“You need to ensure that you have the public support as well as from members within the organization so that these decision factors are seeing that this decision is a good thing and that, depending on the situation, PR piece from administration is in place.”*

In discussing the support of their work once the outsourcing arrangement has begun the Director of Technology went on to state:

DT: *“It would probably require talking about the pros and cons of outsourcing with the staff. Especially in the era of fiscal restraints as the reality is that these decisions are saving teaching positions and streamlining some of the work that we are doing. Showing teachers that they can benefit from the partnership is important.”*

In the absence of this legitimacy, what is at risk is the non-system actor not effectively integrating into the school buildings, culture and climate of the district.

The Director of Student Services also refers to this same need:

DSE2: *“It is especially important to have the buy-in from those with whom the outsourced members are going to work with.”*

Legitimacy within the context of the wider district culture was also evident in the sentiments captured by the superintendent:

S2: *“There is always a cultural component when engaging with different ‘actors.’ The cultural component is always at risk. This will impact the feeling of connection with the school and, by extension, the district. “*

This is somewhat connected to some of the broader but related comments of the Director of Student Services:

DES2: *“It also emerges that having input into the staffing is important. There is a whole area around consultation – referrant power vs. expertise power. I think that is when you are using an outside source you assume expertise but referrant power is also critical. The whole notion of goodness of fit (referrant power) is something to be considered. “*

There was also an aspect to this idea of trust and legitimacy that emerged. For example, the superintendent acknowledged:

S2: *“.....there is a careful balance that is needed with the union whereas the union may look at the decision to go with a particular non-system actor as taking the job of an STA (union) person.”*

In other words, if district leaders are going to decide to expend fiscal resources on an outside provider in lieu of creating in-house jobs, there must be a coherent rationale for this to be accepted.

This idea or notion pertaining to the importance of establishing a rationale for the entry of the outside provider for the benefit of the system actors was also echoed through the Director of Maintenance’s comments regarding outsourcing facilities services.

DM: *“There is an overarching need to ensure that clear and constant communication unfolds. Examples in this district in the past have pointed to this need. As an example, there have been split decision on the School Committee as to whether or not to take away full-time union positions and replace (or minimize) these with non-union people who are from an outsourced provider.”*

The alignment pointing to the importance of a similar idea was stressed through the comments captured from the Director of Technology in his reference to securing the support of staff throughout the organization:

DT: *“As a leader at the district level you also have to have buy-in from those outsourced members with whom they are going to work. You have to make sure that the tech team is ready, willing and able to work alongside the contractor. The parameters need to be established in order to ensure that those folks are ready and willing to talk with each other. There should be set times to communicate with each other and talk through things that have come up as well so that they can get to know each other.”*

In summary, there was a strong alignment within District B regarding the critical importance for the district leader to establish legitimacy in and around the entry of the non-system actor. If it is hoped that these players in school reform and improvement are able to formally enter the school system in a manner that allows them to be accepted, embraced and achieve some degree of legitimacy within the eyes of the system actors, this emerges as an important area of consideration.

Establishing the Context for the Organization

Within District B interview data pointed out that the system leader also needs to ensure that the non-system actor is clear regarding the expectations of the district, especially as it relates to the routines and practices that administration believe are essential in continually monitoring and evaluating the work of the non-system actor. As the superintendent stated:

S2: *“The outside group needs to know what to expect, what the routines, practices and expectations are of the district. Routines, practices and expectations emerge as important.”*

The importance of this was brought to the foreground by the Director of Student Services when referencing an arrangement with a non-system actor who provided specialized instructional programming in the district (and that still continues its involvement). It was acknowledged that this relationship had travelled a ‘bumpy’ road in that all aspects of the district’s expectation were not sufficiently outlined and articulated by the administrator.

DES2: *“I think I have not been vigilant enough, and through the learning curve I realize my expectations for them have not been articulated clearly enough for them.”*

Thus, planning for the successful entry of the outside actor necessitates that there is the same type of attention to the entry process and organizational context setting as when dealing with system actors. If it is hoped that the temporary, non-system actor is to be successful in terms of their integration into the district, then thorough, comprehensive planning which orientates the actor to the setting of the district needs to occur.

Overseeing Organizational Activity

Following the navigation of system entry and establishing a context for the environment within which the non-system actor is expected to carry out their work, there also emerged a deep sense of importance around the district leader’s transition to managing and overseeing the organizational operations within the new organizational arrangement. In particular, there were three areas that were noted which were connected to this oversight.

First, there was clear focus on the importance of *communication* through a number of the interviews. The essence of this communication also was emphasized when referring to multiple stakeholders – either those employees of the district, the members of the non-system actor itself and, members of the community who may be directly or indirectly affected by the work of the outside provider. For example, the Director of Technology offered the following:

DT – *“It is important to have set times to communicate with each other.....and talk through things that have come up as well as structuring ways that will allow them to get to know each other. There is a separate set of communication protocols that need to be in place to ensure effective communication with the service provider coming into the district.”*

The superintendent also referred to the need of ensuring that there is clear communication with the parental and community stakeholders.

S2: *“The communication piece with the people who are the beneficiaries of the service is critical. For example, with the parents of the students in the NECC program, they need*

clear and concise communication. But from the superintendent's point of view I am less involved but it is up to me to direct those responsible for carrying though on those the leadership is more in the management and supervision of the person who oversees the contracting itself. "

Second, leaders identified a clear need around the importance that needs to be applied to effectively *monitor* the work of the non-system actor.

DSE2: *"I need to consider data in consideration of the growth to support the work that they are doing. My contract needs to include reviewing all reports to view the data that supports the work they are doing towards meeting the goals established. "*

Citing another example in the district of technology outsourcing for the development of a software package for the district, the superintendent acknowledged that the appropriate level of oversight languished and the necessary monitoring of this provider's service was not there.

The superintendent (S2) believed that in his role as the CEO of the district he holds a responsibility to oversee the district leaders making these decisions and view the process holistically. Recognizing that he can't possibly be deeply engaged in all aspects of district activity as it relates to the micro aspects of decision making around bringing in a provider outside of the school system, what was identified as vital was for him in his role to provide the oversight and guidance to ensure a complete process is followed.

S2: *"It is more oversight and guidance from the superintendent's perspective, to oversee a manner in which the district can research a vendor, find the best resource, and incorporate the resource into the district in a way that is comfortable, gives high quality service and evaluates and follows-up with that vendor in a way that is usually rewarding so that the vendor knows what it needs to do and the school district is getting the most out of the service. "*

The superintendent also clearly referenced the ongoing process that is necessary in leading this type of arrangement.

S2: *"Ongoing monitoring, evaluation and connection (with the non-system actor) is critical. The way that you align the practices and routines to the work of the district comes through the RFP, and then you have to follow-up and monitor. "*

In a similar way, this was echoed by the Director of Student Services who stated:

DES2: *“Developing a system to monitor them and to make sure that there is a system that ensures that they provide what they said there are going to provide.”*

A final sub-theme regarding the individual administrative skillset and preparation was identified by the Director of Student Services in regards to readying the district leader to exercise leadership and management in collaborative arrangements between the organization and non-system actors. The Director of Student Services very clearly pointed out that he felt that there was a disconnect between the type of work he had been trained for originally and those aspects of the role he now finds himself in. Specifically, DSE2 noted that while he was trained as a school psychologist, he now found himself in this role of a district leader overseeing multiple employees in a department that manages a range of services for students. The entire notion of ‘appropriate’ and necessary leadership and management as it relates to overseeing the organization also, it was suggested, centered around preparation and individual skill development that was unique and different from the more classical educator training that most of those who go into school administration tend to have. This discrepancy, between the typical skill development of an educator and the type of skill development increasingly recognized for the school administrator, was stressed through the Director of Student Services comments:

DSE2: *“.....when you are trying to have multiple parties involved in projects that engage different kinds of skills than those that I was trained with to be a school psychologist... it is imperative that an administrator has some concept of how this works. As a district administrator, I feel that, in general, central office administrators need a lot of professional support and growth develop in the area of business skills. When I went to school for psychology, I wasn’t trained in business. I think in general, skills in leadership development that motivate people this is what school administrators are asked to do and I think there are certain things that we need to learn.”*

There was particular attention drawn to the elements of overseeing the logistical, practical and managerial aspects of the contract by way of leading this process. It was also noted that the ability to impact and affect the contract or relationship on a fluid basis is extremely helpful as evident in the comments by the Director of Technology:

DT2: *“There is an additional set of protocols that I have found I need to cut through the layers of communication. There is the aspect of applying the business sense of contractual oversight and dealing with decision-making with the business environment. Then there is also the understanding and knowledge of strategically knowing how to engage in relationships with vendors.”*

Similar insights were provided by the Director of Special Education who related his past experiences with the special education arrangement:

DSE2: *“We have established a culture between the district and the Walker partnership, and that these staff report to the principal and me as director of Special Education as well as to their supervisor. It took me two years to realize that the teachers from EC were keeping a lit of date files that we (the district) were not seeing. It didn’t occur to these staff that these books, this data collection were really the kids and district’s data.”*

4.4.4 District B Summary

The findings connected with the interview data obtained from leaders within District B were arranged into three separate themes. These themes attempted to capture the views of those district leaders regarding various aspects of leading collaborative arrangements with non-system actors. Situated within these three themes was a broader collection of sub-themes. The first theme included these leader’s perspective regarding their rationale for entering into non-system actor arrangements. Within District B it was found that efforts to seek innovation and expertise along with strategies to economize economic district resources seemed to undergird why these leaders tended to pursue such collaborative arrangements.

The second theme explored the impact of non-system actors on the school district. Within these findings leaders at the district level noted the impact that this form of activity had on the alteration of the traditional delivery model. They also pointed to the specific need to ensure that thought and attention has to be paid to the issue of sustainability of services.

The third theme incorporated three separate sub-themes which included findings related to system entry, organizational context and the overseeing of the organization. System entry focused in on the importance of establishing clear and coherent contractual

arrangements outlining expectations for the non-system actor as well as focusing on establishing the legitimacy of the arrangement. Aspects situated within the organizational context ensuring that administrators clarified and articulated routines, practices and how they would work alongside system actors. Finally, the theme addressing the oversight of the organization included system leaders pointing to the need to establish effective systems of communication, monitoring and developing the individual administrative skillset to perform in the role of a more general business administrative role.

4.5 Cross-District Comparison of District A and B

Through the data collected from interviews with leaders in Districts A and B there emerged a number aspects related to their perceptions regarding three specific themes: i) a rationale for entering into collaborative arrangements within non-system actors; ii) the impact which such arrangements hold for district activity as it relates to leading and managing within such environments and; iii) those factors that these district leaders believe are both appropriate and necessary in terms of leading and managing non-system actor arrangements. This section will attempt to provide a summary of these findings and serve as a cross-case comparison of the data gathered from the leaders interviewed in the two districts.

A Rationale Undergirding Non-System Actor Engagement

Within District A, two sub-themes emerged which served to conceptualize the school district leader perspective's regarding the underlying rationale for entering into formal collaborations with non-system actors. The first finding was focused around the pursuit of these organizational arrangements when there was a perceived limitation of available *funding* in terms of providing for both resources and personnel. Essentially, district leaders pointed to the fact that when a departmental budget (as a part of the overall district operating budget) was unable to provide the full capacity determined necessary to provide for a service, or fund the necessary additional personnel, the pursuit of outside collaborations was pursued as a deliberate means to enhance this capacity but at a much more limited cost. In other words, if the staff was not available and in place through the

budget process, then entering into a contract, even if only temporarily, was deemed advantageous. The second finding which served as the basis to pursue agreements with non-system actors revolved around the belief that the organization itself possessed various *organizational limitations* that would, in their opinion, prevent the ability of the district/department to deliver the necessary service. Consequently, leaders looked outside of the organization for added capacity.

Within District B, there were two factors which district leaders pointed to that served as a rationale for entering into these collaborative agreements. The first factor relates to the core belief that, as a result of the multitude of mandates which school systems are forced to confront, the pursuit of actors from outside of the system holds the best (and most necessary) option to seek *innovative* responses to meet these demands. Alongside this innovation, inserting expertise into the district as provided by an outside provider also was felt to be provided through the collaboration with a non-system actor. Leaders interviewed pointed to the desire to elevate the necessary in-house expertise to deal with problems of practice quickly which was frequently able to be done through bringing into the district the outside ‘knowledge.’ The second factor mentioned during interviews with those in District B included financial considerations as it was indicated that sometimes the engagement of a non-system actor is helpful in terms of economizing the district’s operations.

The Impact of Non-System Actor Engagement with the School District from a Leadership Perspective

Within District A leadership at the central office level identified a number of factors centered around two general sub-themes that were associated with defining the impact that a collaborative arrangement has on the district and their role as leaders. First, aspects associated with the *control* and *accountability* of the non-system actor was identified. Leaders interviewed attested to the fact that when non-system actor involvement was in place, their presence led to a diminished ability for the leader to truly *control* the activity and work of the non-system actor to the same degree as that of a system actor. Many of

the leaders interviewed cited challenges to their leadership that extended to an increased strain as it related to their work as managers of departments. Such things as time, greater attention, care and oversight of activity were things identified.

A second sub-theme emerged as it related to the impact that these arrangements have on system actors within the district. Specifically, leaders pointed out that sometimes the presence of these outside providers can create real tensions as well as conflicts in terms of their effective interface with district staff/personnel and the non-system actors' adaptation to the culture of the organization.

In reflecting upon past and present collaborative arrangements, District B leadership identified two broad sub-themes that they felt led to an impact on the organizational leadership necessary to navigate such activity. First, bringing into the district a non-system actor to deliver service does, in the opinion of a number of leaders interviewed, alter the traditional delivery model by which the work of the public education district is carried out. The grasp of the process is lost, and the picture related to the “nuisances” of this delivery is altered and has to be accounted for through such things as the impact on relationships amongst staff and applied mechanisms of accountability.

A second sub-theme revolved around the aspects associated with the termination and/or departure of the service. Specifically, within the context of employing a non-system actor on a temporary basis, navigating the “dis-engagement” of the actor can present challenges to the leadership of the district that must be addressed in terms of sustainability of service.

Factors that Influence Appropriate Leadership and Management within Non-System Actor Arrangements

The interview data captured through District A leaders identified a number of factors that were perceived to be both important and necessary in enhancing success for district leadership when choosing to embark upon a collaborative arrangement that brings into

the district a non-system actor. Based upon a review of the data, I have sub-divided these factors into three (3) sub-themes which are briefly reviewed below.

i. Preparation for entering in an arrangement with non-system actors

Leaders within District A pointed to two primary areas and which many felt must be attended to in order to realize success for collaborations with non-system actors. First, there must be a very deliberate and focused attempt on establishing the legitimacy with existing staff (i.e. system actors) which includes articulating a clear and coherent rationale for the pursuit of the collaborations. Second, there has to be time and attention focused on brokering the relationships with the non-system actor (s) and the existing district/department culture and staff.

Within District B leaders pointed to the necessity of ensuring that through the contract letting process, the district remains in a position of authority. In addition, similar to District A, leaders articulated a need to ensure that there is a case of legitimacy built around the entry of the non-system actors including a foundation of strong and deep support. Those aspects of structured, deliberate opportunities to ‘align’ relationships between system and non-system actors was deemed important.

ii. Establishing the Context of the Organization

Leaders in both districts stressed the critical importance of leadership overseeing planned and deliberate means of establishing the *context* of the school district. Within District A there was specific mention of the need for leaders to articulate values, organizational goals and system-wide expectations. District B leaders pointed to the need for there to be a clarification of routines, practices and expectations.

iii. *Oversight of Non-System Actor Activity*

District A stressed the importance of developing a system of accountability for the arrangements to ensure that it is clear the lines of accountability for the framework within which the non-system actor should operate. Second, the importance for the system leader to continually assess work and review goals was identified. Third, the interviews pointed to the need for leaders to not only oversee the operations of the non-system actors but also actively plan for their departure by paying attention to the development of a plan for sustainability. District B leaders stressed the importance of communication, monitoring and the individual administrative skillset and preparation as important in overseeing the operation of these non-system actors.

4.6 Reflection on Findings in Relationship to Theory and the Literature

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the nature of appropriate leadership and management practices as conceptualized by school district leaders carrying out the work of the district through collaborative arrangements with non-system actors. Within the context of leadership theories and the wider public administration literature, the findings of this study include a number of areas that emerge as noteworthy and worthy of further consideration.

The first broad theme associated with the findings explored some of the underlying factors that leaders associate with the process of deciding to bring into the district an outside provider. System leaders identified the pursuit of such collaborative arrangements that were built around such factors as seeking to enhance the capacity of the organization, contending with limitations of funding and/or personnel and pursuing innovation and expertise. These insights align with some of the broader findings within the public administration scholarship which point to the need of the leader to understand the organizational transformations underway within and throughout their organizations. Where transformational shifts occur that impact the design of how services are delivered and carried out there is a need to understand the *why* behind these transformations in

order to better focus on the impact that such has on the organization and on those leading these entities.

The study also explored the *how* in which that these organizational transformations are impacting the school district and the associated factors district leaders believe constitute appropriate leadership and management within these collaborative forms of arrangements. These data collected within the present study provided a sense of the impact that these collaborative arrangements are having on the foundation and structure of organizational systems of public education and capture elements that contrast the post-modern and modern forms of organizations. Specifically, this study's findings, and the conditions or elements within which these district leader's describe when non-system actors operate within the district, align with the previous work by Cucchira et al (2011), Bartlett et al (2002) and Whitty and Power (2000) who outlined inter-organizational structural elements that stress collaborations and partnerships within the post-modern organization. This alignment, in terms of both the organizational elements described by these district leaders and how they see their work unfolding, points to a reformation of practice within a school district under conditions that include non-system actor engagement. In other words, the shifts underway in school districts pursuing collaborative arrangements to assist in carrying out their work appear to be emerging as organizations that are starting to mirror those transformations underway that are associated with the shifts from the modern to post-modern organization outlined in the wider public administrative scholarship.

The study's identification that the district leader also needs to exercise control and ensure accountability over the non-system actor, their need to integrate the actor into the existing organization, and the need for the leader to attend to issues with the sustainability of services once the arrangements comes to an end are also deeply connected to the emerging research within the public sector. For example, Van Wart (2003) previously suggested that effective leadership necessitated that the leader provide not only a sense of direction for the actors within the organization but also must ensure satisfaction amongst those conducting the work, an alignment of the work carried out by the non-system actor

with that of the organization itself, and a resource that contributes to, and in many respects aids or invigorates, the culture of the parent organization.

There was also a strong ‘through-line’ with the findings in the present study (*System Entry, Organizational Context and Overseeing Organizational Activity*) and such aforementioned research that I used to help define appropriate leadership and management within these forms of arrangements. Furthermore, the findings are associated with the ‘human agency’ of the organization (O’Reilly & Reed (2011) and identify and affirm the shift of the role set of the leader that unfolds with these transformations of overseeing the collaborations both within and between those actors within the context of the organization. Finally, the study’s findings also echo the work by Milward and Provan (2006) around Public Network Management and inter-agency collaborations by Williams (2002) which stressed leadership attributes that are competency-based around inter-personal elements while building social capital and cultures of trust. Such attributes include the need for the leader to focus on tasks that include managing the legitimacy of the collaborative arrangement, the commitment of both system and non-system actors and the accountability that needs to be ensured around the collaboration itself.

4.7 Summary

My decision to utilize a qualitative methodology as the tool for investigating collaborative arrangements with non-system actors was situated within the context of a determination of its suitability for this area of investigation. Given that I was seeking the perceptions of district leaders, it necessitated that I seek out subjective interpretations of reality to try and interpret these meanings. Ultimately, the decision to utilize semi-structured interviews was positioned around my efforts to gain specific and in-depth knowledge about effective leadership and management practices within arrangements that include non-system actors as conceptualized by these leaders. It seemed appropriate that participating in such conversations, and utilizing pre-structured interview questions, was a reasonable approach to elicit responses that would aptly describe and characterize

their views and identify their values and preferences regarding what practices are best to pursue when confronted with leading and managing in these contexts. A summary and comparison of these findings is included in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Cross-District Analysis – Comparison of District A and B

Themes	District A	District B
<i>Rationale Undergirding Non-System Actor Engagement</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limitations of funding and personnel • Enhancement of Capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation and expertise • Financial – economize district resources
<i>Impact of Non-System Actor Engagement with the School District from a Leadership Perspective</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control & Accountability over Non-System Actors • Issues related to integration with system-actors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alteration of traditional delivery model • Sustainability of services
<i>Factors Associated with Appropriate Leadership & Management within Non-System Actor Arrangements</i>	<p><i>System Entry</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish legitimacy & rationale • Broker relationships with existing culture & staff <p><i>Organizational Context</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulation of values, organizational goals, system-wide expectations <p><i>Overseeing Organizational</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>System of accountability & oversight</i> • <i>Continual assessment of work and goal review</i> • <i>Planning for sustainability</i> 	<p><i>System Entry</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear coherent contract outlining expectations • Legitimacy Building <p><i>Organizational Context</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routines/Practices/Expectations clarified <p><i>Overseeing Organizational Activity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Communication</i> • <i>Monitoring</i> • <i>Administrative Skill-set</i>

In the next chapter I will establish a link between the concepts established within the literature review regarding collaborative leadership and the importance of seeking to better understand these arrangements from the perspective of school leaders. I will also address the research questions including the results from the study considered alongside possible models or leadership theories that may be applicable to the study of such activity.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.0 Introduction

To the degree that it is accepted that school districts play an important role in the coordination and orchestration of the teaching and learning that takes place throughout individual schools, the leadership of those at the district level holds critical importance in the operation of the district and district activity. While the literature related to educational reform has largely neglected the school district's role in this process, there has been work more recently which has supported the importance which the school district plays in assisting the activity that unfolds at the individual school level. If the argument is embraced which positions school districts, their organization and management as that which actually matters in the course of the public education system, then understanding how best to support these organizational structures and heighten their operations becomes critically important.

Throughout the interviews it became apparent that leaders spoke about the integration of non-system actors into their work (and the work of the district and/or a department that they might oversee) as a significant part of 'routine practice.' While the number of outside providers, the duration of their involvement in the district and their structure varied across these two districts, their interjection into the system to aid in delivery seems anything but unusual. Consequently, the notion that school district functions include non-system actors, and that therefore leading these becomes a reality of the work, can be built on. If it is assumed that the current environment within which public education operates is increasingly creating conditions which pulls districts in the direction of pursuing outside providers to assist in the delivery of services, then the linkage between leadership at the district level and the practices required to appropriately manage and lead for the betterment of student outcomes accompanies these structural reconfigurations of the system as a whole.

The literature review within the study suggests that there are differences in how organizations function when they move beyond the traditional hierarchical structure.

While an emerging field of study, it is increasingly recognized that leading an organization that includes desperate actors may involve a variation on what the more typical hierarchical structure necessitates and which is considerably more complicated. As Milward and Provan (2003) have suggested, arrangements within the context of collaborations include issues that are embedded in these structural arrangements that amount to *critical* managerial problems. The question, therefore, becomes what is appropriate and necessary in terms of overseeing these forms of organizational arrangements to effectively guide these organizations?

5.1 Addressing the Research Questions

This study set out to investigate a variety of issues pertaining to school district leadership within the context of organizational arrangements that include collaborations with non-system actors as a means to carry out the work of the district. The primary purpose of this enquiry was to investigate the nature of appropriate leadership and management practices as conceptualized by school district leaders operating within such collaborative arrangements. A secondary purpose was to analyze how relevant leadership theories and/or models can inform an understanding of the practices of leading and managing at the senior or executive level of district leadership within collaborative organizational arrangements situated within public education.

In turn, these research aims were guided by two overarching research questions:

- i) *What is the nature of appropriate leadership and management practices as conceptualized by school district leaders operating within collaborative organizational arrangements?*
- ii) *How can relevant leadership theories and/or models found in the public administration literature be applied to these forms of arrangements in order to provide a framework to help guide further scholarly enquiry?*

As it relates to the first research question this study provides an understanding of the practices which school district leaders conceptualize as appropriate in leading and managing non-system actors engaged in collaborative arrangements with the district. In terms of the second research question, the study identifies the alignment of relevant leadership theories found in the public administration literature with this type of activity in school districts which can serve as a viable means to further study these forms of collaborations. The following chapter will summarize the findings while also discussing the implications of the study alongside any conclusions that can be meaningfully reached.

5.1.1 Research Question #1: *What is the nature of appropriate leadership and management practices as conceptualized by school district leaders operating within collaborative organizational arrangements?*

In an effort to establish a foundation upon which to address the first research question the role of the school district, as understood through the literature, is revisited. Alongside the consideration of the role of the district leader the perceptions of leaders interviewed within the present study regarding the rationale for entering into such collaborative arrangements, and the impact that such activity has on the district, is then reviewed.

Role of the School District Considered Alongside Non-System Actor Engagement

The *school district* plays a number of key roles in support of the overall activity that takes place within a school district and, therefore, the overall activity that takes places throughout schools situated within the district. According to Supovitz (2008), there are three roles of the district which include: the provision of *authority* which necessitates accountability; *support* for the district, its schools and programs as a means to build capacity and; *brokerage*, which revolves around the important role of mediating between outside providers and the needs of the system captured within the context of the interviews.

In both case studies that were established data centered around a variety of themes suggesting that decision making on the part of the school district leader to engage the

district in collaborative arrangements was widely based upon the perception that the organization needed to compensate for limitations of funding, personnel and expertise. It was clear that there was a belief as to the necessity to bring in outside providers to work alongside district employees as a necessary means to ensure that the departments or programs for which they were responsible could meet their needs. These findings solidify the reality which has increasingly become part of the fabric of school district operations that has seen public education reach out to external service providers to support their systemic efforts to bring about instructional and system reform (Coburn, Bae & Turner, 2008). Consequently, these findings support previous work by Supovitz (2008), Honig, (2009) and Coburn (2005) that identifies a structural shift in the landscape, organizational design and template of the local school district which includes the insertion of outside actors (on non-system actors) into the space of K-12 education to assist in the provision of services, expertise and sometimes even management.

Efforts to engage non-system actors is aligned with the role of *support* that school district leaders seek to enact through establishing formalized relationships with non-system actors in an effort to expand the capacity of the district through adding either expertise, personnel or both. The sub-themes undergirding the rationale to form collaborative arrangements in the two districts aligns closely with previous research by Supovitz (2008), Burch (2009), Sunderman (2010) and Cucchiara et al (2011) which suggests that U.S. school systems districts are facing increasing demands which necessitate that their leadership seeks out ways to effectively and efficiently deal with the problems cast upon their organizations while contending with budgetary constraints. It is also worthy to note that the data collected within this study points to activity that is unfolding with these public educational institutions that not only touches upon non-instructional services as has been more the norm (Burch, 2009; Bulkley & Burch, 2011) but also points to non-system actor engagement with instructional related activity in both District A and B. Although there is not the ability to make any generalizations as to this same type of activity that might be unfolding throughout other districts, it nevertheless reflects the type of expansion that Burch (2009) has alluded to previously identifying the fact that outsider providers are beginning to assist with instructional related support in districts.

The Impact of Collaborative Arrangements From the District Leader Perspective

The data gathered in the two case studies supports the fact that these forms of collaborative arrangements hold the potential to impact the district, its activity and, consequently, the activity associated with the role that the district leader plays. The sub-themes within the data capture the fact that district leaders identified concerns over control and accountability of the non-system actor, the integration of the non-system actor into the organization and the overarching impact that the presence of these entities have on the traditional delivery model as well as the sustainability of service. Collectively, these findings support the claims within the literature which suggest that such issues impact the leader's role in retaining *authority* over the organization as a whole. Based upon the sub-themes, there were issues with control and accountability, system-integration into the culture and reference to the alteration of the delivery model itself, there seems to be an alignment with the research that has noted that these types of arrangements hold the potential to impact the template of educational governance. As Scott and DiMartino (2009) and Lubienski (2005) have previously noted, this potential to transform the organization includes the dynamics of leadership and a structural alteration of the system. In general terms, and through their accounts, these leaders directly involved in guiding and overseeing these forms of arrangements on a day-to-day basis pointed to past experiences with outside actors which they believed confronted the work they do as leaders including their authority.

According to Supovitz (2008) the third role which the district plays revolves around *brokerage* and the mediation of relations between the district, its employees and the actor (s) from outside of the system. Serving as a leader with responsibilities overseeing people, programs and departments is a challenging responsibility. Meeting the needs of the students, the system and the staff is increasingly a tall order as a result of forever changing legislation, state and federal demands, and the evolving and complicated nature of meeting all children's needs. As a result of the emerging need to ensure that the district leader can navigate the challenges associated with the insertion of the non-system actor into the district, there is a need for the system leader to effectively broker and mediate

these arrangements. Ball (2009) has stated previously that the necessary changes in terms of leadership of the organization necessitates a reorientation that brings about the need for new forms of knowledge to make governance work within these environments.

In summary, based upon the findings captured within the present study, the role of the school district as proposed by Supovitz (2008) is seen to be enacted through both the decision-making and perceived responsibilities that the school district leader holds in bringing into the district a non-system actor. It seems that the rationale embraced for entering into these agreements hinges upon their alignment with the need to oversee and provide *support* to the district and its programs. At the same time, entering into these collaborative arrangements seems to hold the potential to impact their ability to retain control and accountability of the work of these non-system actors which, in turn, holds the potential to interfere with their authority. Consequently, what emerges is the need for the person holding these leadership positions to be able to carry out and fulfill their responsibilities through understanding that which is perceived necessary to effectively lead and manage actors outside of the school system while concurrently supporting the various roles that the district must carry out in the operation of the district.

Appropriate Leadership and Management Practices

Based upon a review of the findings assembled across the two case studies school district activity associated with collaborative arrangements reflects similar transformations that are taking hold within the wider public sector. Based upon the findings within the current study, these transformations are being pursued by district leaders as a deliberate effort to bring instructional improvements to scale while seeking means to economize resources (Coburn, Bae & Turner, 2008). In many respects it could be argued that if these forms of activity are indeed making in-roads into these institutions, where a new form of public management (Burch, 2006) will need to take hold, these arrangements emerge as inter-organizational models with structures that also include collaborations and partnerships.

Frederickson and Smith (2003) have previously noted the importance of governance as playing a pivotal role in monitoring and overseeing lateral and inter-institutional relations

within organizations that partner with a diverse array of providers beyond the walls of the system. There are also additional competencies (Morse, 2008) required to effectively lead within such organizational arrangements. This enquiry set out to probe what conceptualizes appropriate practices of leading and managing within these settings from the perspective of the district leaders. A review of the interview data in the two districts helps identify a number of practices that district leaders perceive to be necessary to appropriately lead and manage within these contexts. The results of this data have been grouped below into three categories that establish a set of practices which are associated with the provision of appropriate leadership and management within these forms of arrangements between the school district, its leadership, and non-system actors operating inside the organization.

District Entry

Based upon the interview data there were practices that leaders believe should be attended to in advance of the non-system actor's entry into the district and prior to the commencement of their work. These related practices are outlined below.

i. Leaders pointed to the importance of ensuring that the decision to formally collaborate and bring in a non-system actor was *transparent* to the 'system' as a whole. Many of those interviewed identified the fact that there is a clear need for the rationale and potential value and benefit that the arrangement (s) holds to be clearly articulated to the 'system actors' in the district. If a decision is made to bring into the district an entity who is not a full-time/permanent employee and expect them to work alongside system actors in a collaborative, trusting environment, then those district employees need to have a clear understanding as to why the 'outside' actor is present. In the absence of such transparency, leaders identified the fact that there can be potential problems in the *treatment* of these non-system actors by those already in the system and for administration as a whole. At stake, it seems, are issues related to a questioned allegiance and commitment to the organization. One of the three responsibilities that Cuban (1988) identified for the district leader involves being a *Negotiator-Statesman* which

underscored the political and public-relations aspects of the job. Along similar lines, Levin et al (2012) identified a spectrum of responsibilities for the district leader which include setting the priorities of the district as well as for its culture and priorities. These align with the findings which point to the need around what is necessary in attending to these facets of managing the collaborations within the organization.

ii. Related to system entry there also includes a need to attend to aspects of building and developing the legitimacy of the outside actor within the district. Striving to develop the trust and integrity of the outside actor was identified by leaders as important and felt to come through leaders working to create a sense of understanding by employees of the district, the unions and the broader community. Where these “service relationships” are in place, Bryson et al (2006) have previously identified what they term normative and regulatory elements which support the need for the actual collaborative arrangement to both confirm and achieve legitimacy within the organization. This legitimacy will go farther in putting into context why the arrangement exists, the expectations upon which they will operate (see below) and how long it is anticipated that the non-system actor will be within the district. In the absence of establishing this relational aspect as a formation of the collaborative agreement with an outside actor, the district leader’s decision holds the potential of giving rise to a tension amongst staff and the community through the lack of insight of why the financial resources of the district are being directed towards an outside actor.

iii. The importance of the district leader developing an exit plan or strategy at the outset of the arrangement was also referenced as a practical task believed to be important and necessary to aide in the beginning stages of the entry of a non-system actor. While discussions as to the likely termination of a collaborative arrangement were not deemed entirely necessary at the beginning of the arrangement it was evident that consideration needed to be given in developing and articulating a method by which the arrangement would be carefully reviewed to determined its achievement at the end point of the initial contract. Waiting until the end of the contract, and not giving careful thought to the development of a sustainability and succession plan, would be a shortcoming that has the

potential to interfere with the overall success of the district's efforts and the work intended for the provider.

In summary, there are a number of practices associated with the entry of non-system actors that system leaders identified as important considerations in support of successful organizational arrangements. Based upon the perceptions of these senior level system leaders, attending to issues including those of establishing transparency, legitimacy and plans of sustainability were identified as important tasks in heightening the success of arrangements between the school district and a non-system actor which need to be addressed by leaders prior to the commencement of any formalized arrangement. These practices, both individually and collectively, align closely with previous literature which has connected the district leader's responsibility with attending to the political and public relations aspects of the organization.

District Framing

School district leaders pointed to a number of practices centered on the leader's need to establish a 'framework' around the boundaries of the organization. First, ensuring that the incoming non-system actor from outside the district is clear and fully aware of what the district as an organization stands for was deemed important. Understanding the *vision* and *mission* of the district, and taking the appropriate and necessary steps to ensure that non-system actors coming into the organization are aware of these foundational aspects of the organization was felt to be invaluable in managing and leading collaborative arrangements. If outside actors, even temporarily, are going to carry out work within the district then it is imperative that they recognize and understand the key aspects of the organization including what the district stands for (or its vision) and what it strives to accomplish such as its mission or goals. While it may well be that the time in which the non-system actor is connected with the district is only temporary, it was nevertheless the belief of many district leaders that in order for these actors to truly understand the context within which they will operate it is important for their work to align with the district in order to have them maintain their legitimacy within the organization. In his work around

school districts Tyack (2002) stressed that while it is important to be open to outside experts and promising practices, the district (and thus, its leadership) must balance these changes while ensuring that educational programs and pursuits are related carefully to the goals and experiences of the local community.

Second, in addition to the leader structuring opportunities for the non-system actor to develop a deep understanding regarding the vision and mission of the district, a core component of the actor operating within the ‘space’ of the district also must include ensuring that there is a full and complete awareness of what defines the district and what the *expectations* are from the standpoint of the leaders guiding the direction of the district. Just as would be equally important in establishing the foundation for the work of the district actor, the non-system actor needs to be fully aware of the expectations that the district leadership has for these actors and the manner in which they operate. A number of leaders referenced situations where they recalled the presence of non-system actors who simply did not have an understanding of these framing aspects. In the absence of these, they were essentially actors operating in a ‘vacuum’ with no regard or understanding of the organizational context within which they were operating. Bulkley and Burch (2011) suggest in their work around private firms operating in the space of education that this amounts to the extension of the central policy development of the organization and assessing what educational outcomes matter. From the perspective of these district leaders, the outcome of setting the stage and establishing a framework increases the likelihood that these non-system outside actors will operate and conduct themselves *like* system-actors with a clear understanding of the expectations held for the actors within the organization as a whole. In turn, this elevates their operation within the district to that similar to a district employee (or system actor) which tends to enhance the possibility of support by the system as a whole. Ultimately, this then leads to the elevation of trust and legitimacy that they have in terms of their place in the organization.

Overseeing Organizational Activity

The interview data gave rise to a third category of practices that were deemed appropriate and important in terms of supporting activity between a district and a non-system actor. I grouped this collection of practices together as they align with more of a general category pertaining to overseeing the organizational activity of the non-system actor when operating within the boundaries of the district.

Leaders referenced the broad area of two-way *communication* as a factor important in sustaining these arrangements. Clearly, communication between leaders and organizational members is vital at all points within the organization in order to ensure the consistency of the operations. Through the interviews there seemed to emerge an even greater need to attend to establishing clear and well-developed communication protocols and process' that the communication between system leaders and the non-system actors could take. In the absence of this being clearly identified, examples were given where the district leader was in the unenviable position of seeking out information from these non-system actors sometime when it was too late to refine or alter the services. There was a clear need identified which called out for there to be effective two-way communication between the non-system actor and the district and this included the frequency and medium for what was expected in terms of communication. Open lines of communication can also allow for the more effective resolution of disputes when and as they occur which, as noted, is potentially heightened within these arrangements. Ultimately, leaders suggested that in many respects, given the absence of clear lines or established structures of communication, the two-way flow of information can greatly suffer and interfere with the overall operation of the non-system actor, especially when issues arise from the 'management' side of the operations that need to be contended with. While there was not a definitive set of 'best practice' protocols that were identified, the critical importance centered around leaders ensuring that a clearly articulated system of communication and related expectations was established. The importance of communication aligns with Tyack's (2002) contention of the need for successful mediation between system and non-

system actors in order to allow for healthier morale, enhanced trust and the improved coherence around goals.

Another important area related to providing appropriate oversight through leading and managing of non-system actor activity was related to *accountability* structures within the organization and the need to carefully develop, review and put into place such structures. Given that there are various levels within the organization, including the district, school and department level, any lack of clarity around the ‘chain of command’ and to whom the non-system actor reports must be clarified from the outset. Simply signing a contractual agreement for services and integrating the non-system actor into the district in the absence of developing the necessary accountability structure (s) will not serve the district well and holds the potential to interfere with the clarification around who the non-system actor reports. It is understood that often (although not exclusively) the non-system actor also reports to their own superiors so sometimes these entities have multiple ‘reports.’ If in fact this is the case, what also must be established is the critical importance of clarifying the expectations around reporting and accountability with the school district. Essentially, leaders commented on the fact that circling ‘back’ and trying to shore up the lines of authority and accountability in a ‘reactive’ manner after there has been an issue becomes a difficult task that only delays any progress and momentum with the work. Consequently, this serves as one of those areas that must be attended to at the beginning of the agreement and arrangement.

Finally, undergirding all of the various aspects above includes the importance of ensuring that the *contract* established with non-system actors is comprehensive and identifies and carefully formalizes all of the key aspects related to leaders providing organizational oversight of the relationship. Burch (2009) identified the fact that the marketization of education alters the traditional role including that which oversees and controls the vision and values of the organization. Consequently, the district’s role, and thus the district leader’s role, emerges as one that is highly technical, including aspects related to contract management. Clearly, a contract is but a piece of paper, but it also serves as an important ‘connector’ that formalizes the arrangement with the non-system actor. There were a

range of issues inherent within this area that included provision to outline clearly the expectations the district had for such things as evaluations of the actor, the clarification of expectations for their performance not just in terms of the fulfillment of the contract but also on a day-to-day basis at the ‘micro’ level of their work, and how exactly conflict (both in terms of roles and responsibilities) would be addressed. There was also specific mention of utilizing the contract for “calling out” specific rewards (monetary as they might be) for rewarding compliance with goals of the arrangement.

In summary, there was a wide-range of practices that district leaders identified as both appropriate and necessary in establishing heightened success with arrangements that bring in non-system actors to the district. These span three broad areas that include District Entry, District Framing and Oversight of Organizational Activity. While arguably there might well be some overlap in terms of the factors that align with these broad areas, the factors have been identified by these leaders as contributory in their means to bring about and ensure heightened success when operating within these forms of arrangements.

5.1.2 Research Question #2: *How can relevant leadership theories and/or models found in the public administration literature be applied to these forms of arrangements in order to provide a framework to help guide further scholarly enquiry?*

There is a paradigm shift underway with public administrative scholarship that reorients the discussion away from management *of* public organizations to management and leadership *across* organizations in reference to the transformations unfolding with cross-boundary organizational designs and service delivery (Morse, 2008). These shifts are attended to within the literature through a growing number of theories, models and frameworks and the essence of this second research question sought to establish how these might be applied to help guide the future scholarly enquiry of collaborations within the public education setting.

As a number of scholars have noted (e.g. see Brown & Potoski, 2005, Morse, 2008) transformations altering the organizational template within the public sector include such things as contract workers, strategic alliances, outsourcing, networks, partnerships and

collaborations to aid in the delivery of goods and services and as a means in which the demands associated with these institutions are met. Consequently, these changes have given rise to Van Wart's (2005) contention that within the organizational literature there needs to emerge a shift in the focus beyond *intra-organizational* towards that of *inter-organizational* focus. Similarly, within the public agency scholarship, Morse (2008) has advanced *collaborations*, *collaborative governance*, *collaborative public management* and *network management* as fundamental to these paradigm shifts underway.

Table 5.1 below highlights the critical aspects of these models alongside the specific findings from the data gathered from district leaders related to their conceptualization of appropriate leadership and management practices.

Table 5.1 Collaborative Theories Compared with Leader Conceptualization of Appropriate Leadership and Management Practices in Non-System Actor Arrangements

Relevant Theories	Critical Aspects for Effectiveness	Alignment with School District Leader Conceptualization
Inter-Agency Collaborations (Williams, 2002) (Crosby & Bryson, 2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-personal attributes to build social capital • Culture of Trust • Nurturing • Communicating shared meaning 	<p><i>System Entry –</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brokering relationships with existing culture & staff • Legitimacy Building <p><i>Organizational Context –</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routines/practices/expectations clarified • Articulation of values/goals/expectations <p><i>Overseeing Organizational Activity –</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication
Public Network Management (Milward & Provan, 2006) (Huxham & Vangen, 2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tasks more important than capabilities • Determine responsibility • Resolution of disputes • Alignment with district goals • Securing buy-in • Establishing structure • Collaboration communication 	<p><i>System Entry –</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish legitimacy • Broker Relationships with existing staff & culture <p><i>Organizational Context –</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Articulation of goals & expectations</i> <p><i>Overseeing Organizational Activity –</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continual assessment of work and goals • Communication • Monitoring

Collaborative Leadership (Silva, 2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Framing the mission & vision • Establish vision, norms, expectations • Generate support for both internal & external stakeholders • Trust 	<i>System Entry</i> – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulation of values, goals & expectations <i>Organizational Context</i> – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routines/practices/expectations clarified
Collaborative Governance (Arganoff & McGuire, 2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activation • Framing 	<i>System Entry</i> – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish legitimacy & rationale <i>Organizational Context</i> – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulation of values, organizational goals, system-wide expectations
Stakeholder Theory (Schneider, 2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power as a guide for cooperation • Cognitive ability to assess legitimacy, power & urgency 	<i>System Entry</i> – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish legitimacy & rationale • Clear coherent contract outlining expectations • Brokering relationships with existing culture and staff

There are inter-related thematic elements that run through these theories and which align with what Schneider (2002) has previously written about in terms of power and influence and the cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspects of the leadership abilities. Of particular note as it relates to this research question is that these theories deal with relationships working through which is authority, power and cooperation for goal achievement (Schneider, 2002). Based upon the findings associated with the conceptualization of what school district leaders believe is important, the work of leading and managing as identified in collaborative leadership models is deeply connected.

It would seem entirely practical, and of great utility, to utilize such existing theories and models dealing with collaborative organizational arrangements in applying these to further study power and the relationships found between actors throughout the district. This directly links to the previous mention of the managerial logic and role set that Schneider (2002) raised while also aligning with Morse's (2007) contention that pertains to governance and 'steering' the work of actors. In other words, identifying previous work, as established through these models and theories, could be utilized specifically to

better understand the distribution of power, authority and the interactions around the human agency aspect of the organization (O'Reilly & Reed, 2011).

If this 'bridge' between the application of models and theories can exist, then this provides an opportunity to utilize the literature and research within non-educational settings in order to learn from other various sectors and the wider public administration organizations. Perhaps this provides one of those opportunities to meaningfully integrate research within the broader public management setting to that of educational leadership further providing the chance to learn from other sectors within society.

Furthermore, this line of enquiry is justified on a number of levels. First, the environment within which a non-system actor operates is different from which the traditional, hierarchical school district leader operates. Just as is the case that the public manager has to operate differently within a collaborative environment than a hierarchical one, so too does the district leader (Silva, 2011). As such, understanding that there are different behaviors, skills and determinants of how to effectively lead and manage within these contexts is important.

Second, within the U.S. context, network orientation is more extensive in public education settings than in most other countries (Meier & O'Toole, 2001). Consequently, this reality behooves a school superintendent and district administrator to understand and leverage collaborations with other actors. And while it is the case that these leaders can develop new arrangements or alter existing ones to benefit the students and staff in the district, it is important for these leaders to understand that these relationships require attention and active management. Given that the work of leading the district and its actors is a large and demanding enough task on its own, the addition of this element which comes from the insertion of a non-system actor presents another *problem of practice* for the district leader. If the future of school system operations is likely to include a growing presence of outside providers then system leaders need to better understand how to manage these and how they actually need to focus on these arrangements.

Finally, further enquiry into this area also holds the potential to respond to the call to re-orient educational leadership around the technical aspects of the work and efforts to anchor a deeper understanding of school leadership around the organization.

5.2 Contributions Made By the Study to Literature and Practice

This thesis contributes to the wider body of work within the public administration scholarship as well as within the educational leadership literature connected to school districts and their leadership and management. Within this context, the thesis contributes to both the literature and practice and each will be briefly touched upon below.

In consideration of the literature, there are two bodies of work within which the findings of this study are connected. First, within the public administration scholarship, the interconnections across organizational boundaries to carry out a public purpose has a growing place of importance as public sectors evolve due to these transformations. These sectors are ‘re-imaging’ their existence where collaboration is increasingly becoming a means of survival and where, as Brown & Potoski (2005) have previously argued, leaders have struggled to be as systematic in their ability to manage and oversee both the organization itself as well as the contracting process. The findings in this study provide a link between this type of activity within the public education sector and the activity nested within the broader public administration. Through the findings included in this study, it is clear that the collaborative activity increasingly of focus within the broader public sector is also in-view within institutions of public education.

Within the educational leadership and management literature, this thesis reinforces previous work by Supovitz (2008), Honiq (2009) and Coburn (2005) which underscores the fact that district leaders increasingly operate within environments where the organizational design of the local school district includes the integration of outside actors to contribute to the necessary work of the district. Within this context, it is increasingly important to develop a deeper understanding of these shifts and the thinking that contributes to such decision-making. In so doing, the thesis also provides empirical

evidence in the area of public education by responding to the call advanced by such scholars as Cucchiara et al (2011) who have argued for filling a research void in the pursuit of seeking to better understand the ‘market flow’ through public education and its impact on decision-making and resource allocation.

The findings within the present study also help establish a broad contribution to the practice of school district leadership and the work associated with leading a school district with formal collaborations in these contexts. While there has been some attention within the literature surrounding leading collaborations within public sectors, such study has been almost non-existent within the context of public education (Burch, 2002). This study provides a beginning insight into the dynamics at play within these arrangements and the emerging themes synthesized from the findings point to the fact that leaders have to manage and lead not just the agency of collaborative partnerships but also the existing staff, programs and culture. The findings herein begin to establish a basis of understanding for the district leader to consider as they think about leading and managing the organization within such collaborations. For example, the study identified the fact that system leaders should consider the impact of such arrangements on the district, the need to attend to such variables as aspects of control and accountability and how the integration of the outside provider occurs and the means in which the services will be sustained once the collaboration ends. The study also captured additional findings that point to the district leader considering the entry of the non-system actor, the context within which they will operate and the types of things that the system leader needs to consider in terms of overseeing these forms of activity. Ultimately, these findings underscores research by Morse (2008) and Brown & Potoski (2005) who previously argued that additional competencies are required to effectively lead and manage across organizations where there the introduction of a non-system actor into the system is at play.

5.3 Summary

The interviews conducted within the present study lead to a set of findings which, from the district leader's perspective, begin to conceptualize what are appropriate leadership and management of non-system actors. While this data does not point to any actual testable data in terms of quantifiable measures, nor is it exhaustive in terms of its scope, the findings within the present study can be reasonably aligned with what leaders, those in the 'trenches' and working within the bounds of these arrangements, perceive to be valuable and appropriate and provide a starting point into unpacking the critically important aspects that need to be attended to when contracting out for service.

While the two districts representing the two case studies varied in terms of the types of activities that non-system actors assisted with, or the longevity or perceived efficacy of these arrangements, some programs were certainly cited by leaders as having been more effective than others. Interestingly, despite variations in service delivery, none of the administrators suggested that they had a lack of confidence in the ability for these arrangements to help benefit the district. In addition, there was support by leaders in both school districts as to the fact that these arrangements are increasing and prevalent in various modes of their operations. Given that no single leader interviewed indicated that this practice of engaging in collaborative arrangements was one that should be eliminated helps in the formation of assumptions that these forms of arrangements are likely to continue as a strategic means for leaders looking to expand the capacity of the district.

It is important to note that all those interviewed within the present study were senior administrators and it could well be that a study probing the perceptions of administrators at different levels working more closely with the actors/arrangements, and/or staff members functioning alongside the non-system actors, would produce a different conceptualization as to the perceptions of their operations and functions and what practices are necessary. If this study was to be repeated then the inclusion of wider personnel (or system actors) as well as administrators at different levels of the organization, should be included and could yield interesting results.

An interesting area for further research would also be to explore these specific differences alongside investigating whether or not there are other varying dimensions or factors which influence appropriate and necessary leadership and management when a system actor's presence varies with the district. For example, is there a variation when a non-system actor enters the district for a very brief period of time (i.e. say a year or less) in comparison to those arrangements that span multiple years? Are there differences pertaining to non-system actors working at the district level removed from the individual school level and the practices that may be called for in situations where non-system actors are engaged across the district? Finally, are there distinguishable differences in terms of leading and managing non-system actors that work closer to the instructional core as opposed to work centered within non-instructional services?

If this study, or aspects of it, were to be repeated then it would be wise to include a secondary instrument to gather richer data such as in the form of administering a questionnaire. This could perhaps better probe these dimensions while also affording participants the opportunity to provide even richer data in the form of extracting more precise assessments over what works in these arrangements.

It is this need to probe deeper into this area of understanding school district leadership and, specifically, what is necessary to appropriately exercise the leadership function of overseeing a district's operations, that directly connects to the second research question within the study. In the absence of substantial insight within the public education scholarship, finding a suitable point around which to center further enquiry within this domain becomes important. The field of literature is already rather limited in terms of studying the work of leaders at the district level within the contexts of managing and leading the organization as a whole. Little known, if any, research exists regarding more deeply examining leaders leading both system and non-system actors. Given the nuisances and contextual factors which leaders have begun to identify within the present study, there does seem to exist a reasonable point of connection in terms of using collaborative leadership models to delve deeper into this area of research within the context of the school district setting.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Kelman, Hong and Turbitt (2011) have argued that collaborative arrangements that engage multiple actors from both inside and outside of public organizations are increasingly considered commonplace within contemporary society despite the fact that there is limited empirical understanding regarding the impact that such activity has on the organization. As the pillars of public education, school districts are also increasingly turning to outside providers (referred to in this study as non-system actors) anchored by a growing belief that these forms of partnerships might be more effective, efficient, innovative and necessary in meeting the demands placed upon school systems (Chubb & Moe, 1990; DiMarino, 2014).

This final chapter serves as the conclusion to the study and is divided into three main areas: i) a reflection upon the study's findings and its contribution the literature; ii) a summary of the recommendations for practice and research and; iii) a brief commentary on the relationship between the study's title and conclusions to the work.

6.1 Reflection on the Findings & the Contribution to the Literature

Williams (2002) has argued that little attention has been paid to the role of individuals involved in the management of collaborative arrangements and what is actually needed or required to be successful in leading and managing these forms of organizational activity. The literature within the field of educational administration is equally thin as it relates to two fundamental aspects of leadership: i) the study and understanding of the school district leader in general and; ii) a understanding of what is necessary for the district leader to exercise appropriate leadership and management within arrangements that involve non-system actors.

The present study examines aspects of school district leadership within the context of collaborative arrangements where non-system actors are engaged in the work of the district. The study was centered around two primary research aims which included: i) exploring the nature of appropriate leadership and management practices as

conceptualized by school district leaders operating within these arrangements and; ii) examining how relevant leadership theories or models situated within the public administration scholarship can inform an understanding of leading and managing within collaborative organizational arrangements that include non-system actors carrying out the work of the school district.

Within the literature review three fundamental roles of school districts were profiled and included the district's role in providing authority, support and brokerage to the schools, programs and personnel served. The findings associated with the primary research aim of the study pointed to three categories that established a set of practices associated with the provision of appropriate leadership and management within these arrangements. Each of these categories identified a number of practices which leaders believed were important to their work in leading and managing and included *District Entry*, *District Framing* and *Oversight of Organizational Activity*.

Within the context of the second research aim, the study found similar organizational shifts within school districts where collaborative arrangements are in place and findings situated within the wider public sector where such collaborative arrangements between organizations exist. Based upon those interviewed across the two districts these findings support the notion that structural shifts are occurring within the educational setting where non-system actors enter the walls of the school system to aid in the delivery of services, expertise and sometime even ancillary management. Leaders are consciously pursuing these forms of arrangements to bring instructional improvements to scale alongside efforts to maximize their fiscal efficiency. Ultimately, the activity associated with these collaborative arrangements mirrors the types of organizational shifts noted in other public sectors.

The literature review within the present study included an examination of theories and models such as *Inter-Agency Collaborations* (Williams, 2002), *Public Network Management* (Milward & Provan, 2006) and Morse's (2008) collaborative governance and network management. The findings of this study strongly suggest that there is an

alignment and connection between these theories and the school district leader's conceptualization around what the appropriate leadership and management practices require within non-system actor arrangements.

The study also examined the impact of collaborative arrangements on the organization and the work of the district leader. What became clear was that collaborations with non-system actors necessitated that the district leader re-consider what is needed to effectively broker and mediate these arrangements. The study's findings further teased out elements such as authority, power and cooperation and relationships embedded with collaborative leadership between system and non-system actors. Specifically, the findings suggested that within arrangements that include collaborations there is a shift in the necessary activity of the leader that is best described as transitioning from the management *of* public organizations to management and leadership *across* organizations.

At the center of these transformations there are new forms of knowledge necessary to make these operations work and allow one to effectively manage the responsibilities of leading at the senior executive level. The focus becomes that of Schneider's (2002) attention to what the *managerial logic* and *role set* of the leader becomes and what emerges as appropriate to lead in these contexts aligns with the essential need to *coordinate* or *govern* the district's work. Thus, the work of leading within collaborations (or organizational interconnections) is becoming more widely associated with aspects of governing or governance and transcends the act of simply leading and managing. Morse's (2008) contention that governance is the steering of the public's business through the coordination of multiple actors and Frederickson and Smith (2003) notion that the concept includes the lateral and inter-institutional relations within and by public administrators takes on a greater role of consideration for the system leader.

6.2 Recommendations for Practice and Research

Formalized collaborative arrangements reflect the growing space within which public education, and public sectors in general, increasingly are conducting their business. There

are a number of recommendations for both practice and research which emerge from the findings within the present study.

In serving as a district leader within these environments, it is important that the school district leader seeks to understand the implications of collaborations on their work and that of the district. The leader serving at the district level must understand that these arrangements require careful attention and active management and recognize that, in their own way, presents another *problem of practice* for the leader to contend with. The understanding that formal collaborations in the form of non-system actors gives rise to the role and responsibility of the leader to manage, control and hold accountable this district partner. In addition, not only is there the need to attend to this area of influence but that which also emerges is the need to pay attention to the impact on the rest of the organization.

Based upon the findings of the study key recommendations for practice for district leaders operating within collaborative arrangements include the following:

- Thoroughly prepare for the entry of the non-system actor and ensure that the legitimacy of the partnership is established with existing system actors while providing a clear and coherent rationale for the partnership.
- Spend time articulating the school district's values, goals and expectations alongside clarifying routines and practices for the non-system actors.
- Develop systems of accountability which include assessing and reviewing the goals for the arrangement and planning for sustainability once the arrangement ends.

Further enquiry into this area holds the potential to respond to calls within the research community that reorients educational leadership around the technical aspects of the work while further enhancing a deeper understanding of school leadership within different contexts. As a result, the following represent recommendations that could be explored for further research:

- While this study focused on those leaders at the senior management level it would be interesting to probe the perceptions of administrators at different levels of the school system who work with non-system actors. This could be informative and

helpful in the further conceptualization of developing a sense of the practices necessary to appropriately integrate the non-system actor into the system.

- It would be helpful to further explore whether there are differences of leading and managing non-system actors when the work is both closer to, or further from, the instructional core (i.e. non-instructional services).
- Exploring whether or not there are differences in terms of the necessary oversight between a collaborative arrangement that last for a shorter period of time as compared to a longer point of association could help inform whether or not there are any variations that need to occur depending on the time period of the arrangement.
- If the bridge or connection between the models and theories such as those profiled in the literature review around collaborations exists as suggested herein, there is an important opportunity to further utilize the literature and research within non-educational settings and the wider public administration and apply it to educational settings.

6.3 The Relationship Between the Study's Title & Conclusions

The title of this thesis is *Leadership in Collaborations: School District Governance in the Context of Leading Non-System Actors*. Within the landscape where public sectors are pursuing formalized assistance from non-system actors to aid in their work there emerges three distinct but related aspects which are captured within the title of this thesis and, I believe, relate to the conclusions of the study.

First, this is a study about *school districts* as organizational entities that hold the important responsibility for coordinating and conducting the work within the system of schools that represents the district. This study is not about individualized schools but about the larger entities that comprise a system of schools and, therefore, speaks to a variation in the level of leadership and responsibility as an educational leader.

Second, using the district as the backdrop, the focus on this type of activity was further refined in the examination of the district' pursuit of *collaborative arrangements* with *non-system actors*, or those entities that enter through the walls of the district to carry to

support in the delivering of services. Within these collaborations, issues related to the leadership and management of these arrangements became an area of focus.

Third, through the examination of leading and managing within these environments, and a broader consideration of the scholarly work which pertains to the public administration theories and collaborations, the findings herein point to the fact that what is ultimately necessary for the person serving in the senior management level to effectively lead and manage the system is for the district leader to effectively ‘govern.’ The work of the district leader, within the environment that includes collaborations and interconnections between both system and non-system actors, represents not simply school district leadership but more tightly aligns with the work of ‘governing’ which includes overseeing the networks and collaborations that are established through these formal arrangements. As a result, the work of the district leader within this context is about ensuring that the legitimacy of the district continues to evolve around the three important roles of the district which include *support, brokerage and authority*. In order to realize these roles, this study points to the need of the district leader to not only lead and manage their organizations but also their need to ‘steer’, ‘navigate’ and, therefore ‘govern’ their districts.

6.4 Final Thoughts

To the degree that it is accepted that school districts play an important role in the coordination and orchestration of the teaching and learning that takes place within individual school houses, the leadership of those at the district level holds critical importance in the operation of the district and district activity. While this aspect of the school district as it relates to educational reform has been somewhat neglected in the past within the literature, there has been work more recently which has supported the importance which the school district plays in assisting the activity that unfolds at the individual school level. If the arguments advanced by Elmore (1993) and Fullan (2005) are embraced and which positions school districts, their organization and management as that which actually matters in the course of the public education system, then understanding how best to support these organizational structures and heighten their

operations becomes critically important. In addition, if it is also assumed that the current environment within which public education operates is increasingly creating conditions which ‘pulls’ districts in the direction of pursuing outside providers to assist in the delivery of services, then the linkage between leadership at the district level and the practices required to appropriately manage and lead for the betterment of student outcomes also matters.

In closing, a number of interesting insights and avenues for further research have been formulated within this current study. It is hoped that the findings will contribute in a small way to the limited body of research that currently exists around both school district leadership as well as public sector leadership. More specifically, it is hoped that this study will lead toward further studies and empirical research which advances a deeper understanding of leading in public education within the post-modern era while striving to help improve district, school and student outcomes.

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APPENDIX

To:
From: Glenn Brand
Date: March 5, 2013
Re: An Invitation to Participate In A Research Study

Thanks for your willingness to meet to discuss my area of study for my dissertation. I have assembled the information below to try and give you a background and context for the area I am investigating. In addition, I have included a tentative set of questions that I am interested in gathering your perspective on.

I look forward to the opportunity to meet with you.

Regards,

Glenn

Topic Area: School District Outsourcing

Background & Purpose of Study:

The act of outsourcing such things as professional development, instructional services, curriculum and the like is a growing trend in schools and districts across the country in response to policy demanding system improvement alongside efforts for districts and schools to limit and control budgets as a result of shrinking fiscal resources.

The purpose of this study is to examine the readiness factors and conditions that must be in place so that arrangements between public school districts and service-providers external to the district can lead to long-term success and sustainability.

Outsourcing & Non-System Actors Defined:

For the purposes of this study, I provide the following as a framework for outsourcing activity that falls under the area of non-system actors in public education:

Outsourcing involves organizations and/or individuals from outside a school district entering into financial agreements for the purposes of providing the district with information, training, materials and programs that are anticipated to help in instructional or non-instructional improvement. Such a partnership involves a contract and exchange of funds with 'actors' outside of the school system to support the work of the district.

As defined in the context of this study, *non-system actors* include private for-profit or non-profit agencies, firms or organizations that enter into formalized

agreements with districts to aid in the delivery, provision or support of instructional related services aimed at expanding district and school capacity.

Method of Data Collection:

I anticipate developing the study using case study methodology and am interested in gathering insight from those in the profession who regularly are in positions to make decisions at the district level regarding potential outsourcing activity of the school district.

At this stage of the research I am looking to conduct 45 – 60 minute interviews with a variety of district administrators who work in districts where there are examples of this type of outsourcing activity.

Logistics of Interviews:

Participation in the interviews itself is voluntary and any and all information shared will be entirely confidential. While the interviews will be digitally recorded (and could be transcribed at a future point in time) any information gathered will be held in complete confidence by the researcher with the identity of the district and the individual district administrator will be kept anonymous.

Target Audience:

I am focusing on interviewing district administrators who hold responsibilities of coordinating services with their school district with outside vendors.

Definition of District Administrators:

Superintendent
Assistant Superintendent
Directors
Coordinators

Potential Benefits Of The Study

Potential benefits from the information gained through this study will center around deepening the understanding of how school district leaders can best facilitate their district's collaboration and partnerships with companies, agencies or firms that have entered agreements with the district.

Research Questions To Be Asked:

On the attached sheet is a tentative list of research questions that I would like to talk about during our interview. I am curious as to your feedback and responses to the questions posed here and also about other questions or topics that you might suggest I explore.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Study: *The Impact of Non-System Actors on School District Leadership: An Analysis of Micro Level Processes*

Researcher: Glenn A. Brand, Assistant Superintendent, Sharon Public Schools & Doctoral Student

Identification of Investigator & Purpose of Study

A selection of district leaders will be invited to participate in a study conducted by myself, Glenn Brand, that I am currently conducting as a doctoral student at The University of Bath (U.K.). The purpose of this study is to to examine how arrangements between public school districts and *non-system actors* engaged in supporting or providing instructional-related services impact the work of educational leaders at the district level that aims to This study will serve as my dissertation as part of the graduate program that I am currently enrolled in.

Background of Investigator:

I currently serve as the Assistant Superintendent for Administration & Finance with the Sharon Public Schools in Sharon, Massachusetts. Prior to my service in Sharon I served as a principal in Needham, MA. My educational background includes a M.Ed. in Educational Administration from the University of Toronto, and a B.Ed. and a B.A. from The University of Western Ontario. I served as a teacher and administrator in the Peel District School Board in Ontario, Canada before moving to Massachusetts in 2002.

Benefits Of Participating In Study

Potential benefits from participation in this study include deepening the understanding of how school district leaders can best facilitate their district's collaboration and partnerships with non-system actors. Both as a district actively seeking support in the form of external partnerships as means towards improving instruction, assessment and performance, it is anticipated that the findings from this study will identify best practices from a number of other district settings.

Study Design:

This study will be qualitative in nature and be in the form of a case study. I anticipate that each 'case' will include the study of a collection of district leaders within one district. I anticipate that the opportunity of exploring these events and this activity through the perception of individuals involved directly with the arrangements that involve non-system actors will better help explain the *how* and *why* questions that emerge from looking at this type of activity.

Data Collection & Analysis

Interviews will be used in the study for the specific purpose of gaining a more thorough and in-depth understanding of how the district leaders involved in these cases think. The interviews will be structured with open-ended questions and will serve as the main source of data that will be collected in the study. These will be used to capture their thoughts, ideas, perceptions and experiences as it relates to the involvement of non-system actors who have partnered with a school district for the delivery of instructional services.

The researcher will contact these individuals ahead of time following the initial correspondence and invitation to participate in what is anticipated to be approximately a 60-minute interview.

Interviews will be transcribed and coded with the aim to look for themes from the responses.

Confidentiality

The results of this research will be presented as part of this dissertation. While the responses of all individual participants will be recorded anonymously and kept confidential, the aggregated data will be presented in my final study and represent averages or generalizations about the responses as whole. No identifiable information will be collected from the participants in this study or from the school districts themselves, and no identifiable information (for either individuals or districts for whom the participants work) will be presented in the final research study. All of the data collected will be stored in a secure location and will be accessible only to this researcher.

Participation & Withdrawal

The participation of participants will be entirely voluntary. And, once a participant indicates a desire to participate, they will hold the right to withdraw from the study at any time. However, once participation has occurred, and responses have been gathered and anonymously recorded these will not be able to be withdrawn from the study.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or concerns regarding the study, or after its completion you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregated results of the study, please contact:

Researcher's Name: Glenn Brand
Educational Leadership & Management

Advisor's Name: Chris James, Professor of

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The University of Bath (U.K.)
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